Boston Athenæum.

From the income of the fund given by

John Bromfield

of Boston, merchant, b. 1779 d. 1849

Received July 6, 1931

To replace worn Copy

EXTRACT FROM THE THIRTEENTH OF THE RULES FOR THE LIBRARY AND READING ROOM OF THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM

"If any book shall be lost or injured, or if any notes, comments, or other matters shall be written, or in any manner inserted therein, the person to whom it stands charged shall replace it by a new volume, or set, if it belongs to a set."

5M APRIL, 1931

VICTORIAN

:: *Victorian* ::

By Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick :: :: ::

Author of "Law and Outlaw," "The Purple Jar,"

:: :: :: :: *etc., etc.* :: :: :: ::

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.
:: :: *PATERNOSTER ROW* :: ::

82210
B. F.
July 6, 1931
To replace
worn copy
YEF
.Si13
.Y

VICTORIAN

I

THERE was a difference of ten years between Christian Westlake and her half sister Clare. Christian was eighteen and Clare was twenty-eight : and Clare had been married to Major Loudon for eight years. The Loudons lived mostly in their country home at Granfield and until lately Christian had lived with her widowed mother at Chiswick, so the step-sisters had not seen much of each other since Clare's marriage. Christian remembered that event well because she had been a bridesmaid and had slept the night after the wedding with a bit of bride-cake under her pillow. But otherwise she did not know or remember a great deal about Clare. Mrs. Westlake hardly ever spoke of her step-daughter and she had never allowed Christian to stay with the Loudons at Highwood. Christian did not know why ; but she gathered that there was some slight estrangement between her mother and her step-sister and that it was her mother who kept it up.

Clare, off and on, showed signs of wishing to be friendly. Sometimes she sent presents of game or fruit to Chiswick ; once or twice when she was staying in London she appeared there ; and last Christmas she had written to say that she was giving a dance on New Year's Eve and would like Christian to come to it. She had apparently forgotten that Christian had let her know about three weeks before that Mrs. Westlake was stricken with a mortal illness and not likely to live into the New Year. This certainly seemed heartless,

but perhaps was not surprising. There had never been any love lost between Mrs. Westlake and her step-daughter and for eight years they had hardly ever met. Christian was alone with her mother when she died.

It was Major Loudon who came up to London, stayed at Chiswick and stood by Christian until the funeral was over. Clare sent charming messages and flowers but she did not come. In one of her letters to her husband she ' wondered what poor Christian would do now ' and Major Loudon understood from this remark that his wife was not anxious to have her step-sister at Highwood. But there was nowhere else for Christian to be and Major Loudon wrote and said so plainly. It was out of the question that a girl of her age should live on by herself at Chiswick ; and there was hardly money enough to keep up the house and pay a chaperon. Besides he did not like the idea of it. There were no other relatives who could offer her a home, for Clare's Aunt Bethia was not related to Christian and indeed had never seen her. Mrs. Westlake had lived like a recluse it seemed, and Christian showed signs of it. She was quiet, shy and timid. He was sure that Clare would not find her in the way and he proposed to arrive with her on the following Tuesday by the five o'clock train. He was obliged to stay till then because there were business matters to arrange for Christian. The money, as Clare probably knew, had belonged to Mrs. Westlake and had been left to her own child, which was natural. Clare had inherited nothing. Christian would have about five hundred a year of her own and any furniture she wished to keep. She desired to know whether there were things in the house that Clare remembered and

would like reserved for her. She wrote to Clare herself to say so ; but Clare did not covet her stepmother's mid-Victorian possessions and never answered the letter. She was sure that Christian would be mid-Victorian too and wished she was not coming to Highwood ; but she recognized that it could not be helped for the present. When her husband got an idea into his head he turned obstinate and he evidently had ideas about Christian. He had written to say that the large attic with a view was to be painted and prepared at once as Christian would have her piano there and use it as a sitting-room. The paper and paint were both to be ivory white.

Clare could not make up her mind whether to be pleased or annoyed by these instructions. If Christian wanted her own sitting-room and her own piano she would not be always in her sister's pocket ; and Clare disliked people in her pocket. But paper, paint and a piano had a lasting sound, as if Christian once established, would not be easily uprooted ; and an established sister, young but mid-Victorian in her ways and critical might be a heavy trial. However it was not Clare's habit to take things heavily. She was accustomed to living with people who were stuffy because she liked to enjoy herself. Her stepmother had often been stuffy. John, her husband, used to be, but had settled down lately to a disapproving acquiescence. John was only forty, but he was old for his years and would have chosen to lead a quiet life ; but when life was quiet Clare found it dull.

She ran up to London as often as possible and stayed as long as she could ; but John positively refused to live in London. Highwood had belonged to his father

and to his grandfather who had been a banker and had made the money on which John and Clare led their comfortable lives. It was a good sized house with about twenty acres of land belonging to it and a garden in which John took a knowledgeable interest. Clare liked the garden too, but for different reasons. It had certain tucked away seats associated in her mind with summer days and moonlit nights and it led at one point to the shore of the creek where their boats were stored in the boat-house. From the boat-house you looked across the water at Maniton, the home of the Hawkes.

For more than a year Maniton had stood empty. Raymond Hawke, the unmarried owner of the property had died unexpectedly in London of pneumonia succeeding influenza. His sister Jane was a girl of sixteen at the time and still at school and his only brother Oliver had been abroad for years. Major Loudon remembered Oliver, but Clare had never seen him. He had left England at the age of eighteen and all she knew of his appearance was derived from a small faded photograph on the library chimney-piece at Maniton. It was not a photograph that told her much and her husband had no power of description. When she asked him about Oliver he said that he had been a boy like any other but a bit wild and that when he left school he had taken the bit between his teeth and announced that he meant to see the world. So he had set off at his own time and in his own way and for fifteen years had been a wanderer. He had not written home often since his mother died and Raymond, though friendly to his brother had rarely spoken of him. He must be a man of thirty-three now and Major Loudon wondered whether he would ever settle

down to English country life. He had taken twelve months to make up his mind to it and arrange his affairs ; which looked as if he were in no hurry.

" Has he made money out there ? " Clare had asked ; but Major Loudon had not been able to tell her. Clare hoped he had. It would make a great difference to her if there was someone young and open-handed at Maniton who would share in her schemes for enjoyment. Raymond Hawke had been young and devoted and she had missed him greatly ; but he had not been well off. John, her husband, was well off but he spent large sums of money on dull objects such as charities and agricultural implements ; and he grumbled at her bills for clothes and small personal luxuries. She wondered whether Christian would know how to dress and was not quite sure which she would rather have in the house, a rival or a foil. She herself loved clothes and pleasure more than anything in the world. By strait-laced people she was considered a flirt and, she did run about in the company of young men more than was discreet or pleasing to her husband. But hitherto her feelings for her admirers had been of the thinnest description and liable to change. Tom, Dick or Harry. . . . It was much the same to her, provided they would join in picnics, sail up and down the creek, dine and dance afterwards, stroll about the garden by day and by night and assure her she was the loveliest of women.

She certainly was a lovely woman. Christian's first impression of her step-sister was one of dazzlement as she entered the lighted hall and was impulsively embraced by a willowy creature in a sheathed garment of rose-coloured brocade. She had not often seen her

step-sister since her marriage eight years ago and between their meetings she seemed always to forget the vivid effect of Clare, her dark melting eyes, the rich tints of her complexion, her easy smiles, and the beguilement of her ways. She knew that the magic would not last: or rather that it would have holes in it before long; but time after time it renewed itself as it did to-day, irresistibly.

"Poor darling!" Mrs. Loudon murmured as she took in Christian's triste appearance. "I suppose I ought to be in mourning too, but I thought I'd wait and hear what John and you thought about it."

She breathed the softest of sighs and looked under her long eye-lashes at her husband.

"Mourning means so many new clothes," she added, "I'm wearing out old ones."

If John heard he did not answer, but gave orders about luggage and said they had had a cold journey. Then the step-sisters went upstairs together to the bedroom prepared for Christian which was a comfortable one with the curtains drawn and a good fire burning.

"I'll stay till your luggage comes and then I'll send Hill to unpack for you," said Clare. "I've told Hill she is to wait on you as you haven't brought a maid. John said in one of his letters that we could share my maid, Price, but we could not. Price wouldn't like it. She gives herself dreadful airs and I'm her slave; but she can make an old frock look like a new one so I bear with her. Besides I don't believe in sharing maids. We shall be doing things together till the last minute and want our hair tidied in a tearing hurry at the same time."

"I've always done my own hair and I've never had

a maid," said Christian. " I should not know what to do with one. And I would rather unpack my own trunks . . . thank you very much. Then I shall know where my things are."

Clare looked meditatively at her step-sister and smiled one of her sweet smiles. " Middle-class," she was thinking to herself, " not only mid-Victorian but dowdy and middle-class, like my unregretted step-mother who must have been born in the sixties. She might be pretty if she knew what to do with herself but no one would guess it. That crow black doesn't suit her and she has evidently bought a reach-me-down at one of the cheap shops, and as for her hat it's the limit."

" Where did you buy your hat, darling ? " she said, because Christian became aware that her step-sister's gaze was fixed on it.

" It was one of those 12/9 ones at Cork and Swan's," said Christian. " I had to buy things in a hurry before the funeral and I thought this one was too small and heavy for me ; but it was the best I could find. Do you like it ? "

" It's charming," murmured Clare indistinctly.

" Perhaps you would like to copy it . . . if you go into mourning. The girl who sold it said it was a Paris model."

" I should love to," said Clare ; and then the servants appeared with a small trunk and a bag.

" I suppose your other things are coming later ? " said Clare.

" I have no other things," said Christian and immediately corrected herself.

" I have a case full of books and music," she explained. " They are coming by luggage train."

II

OLIVER HAWKE was returning to Granfield after an absence of fifteen years. He was not particularly glad to return. He had enjoyed a week or two in London, but he did not feel a choke in the throat as the train arrived at Granfield and he began to see some of the landmarks associated with his youth. On the contrary. The skies were grey, the rain was falling in a drizzle, no one was about who knew him and he had a cold in his head. However here he was and he must make the best of it. The sky would not always be grey and if he found rural civilisation unbearable he supposed he could sell Maniton and return to the Federated Malay States. Luckily he was not married and would not have a wife to pacify if he made up his mind to this. Luckily also poor Raymond had never married and there was no weeping widow at Maniton whom it would be legal but brutal to turn out and impossible to retain. He was used to a bachelor household and could not endure the thought of any other. And he supposed his young sister Jane would expect to spend her holidays at Maniton as long as he was there ; but he would not have her as a permanent inmate, keeping house for him. She had suggested this in her last absurdly affectionate letter which he had not answered yet. How could there be any affection between a brother of thirty-three and a sister of seventeen who had not met for fifteen years ? He remembered a fat dark eyed

baby toddling from one chair to the next across the nursery floor ; and Jane's new photograph showed him a young woman with her hair fashionably done and her skirts fashionably narrow. She was almost beyond the flapper stage and talked in her letter of leaving school and ' coming out.' He must make sure at what age it was usual for girls to leave school before he answered her. He was her guardian till she was twenty-one and she would have to stay on at school if he said so ; but of course he wished to be kind to her, though he decidedly did not want her at Maniton. Women always complicated a man's plans, even when they were as young as Jane. In his own home he could do without them.

A dog-cart from Maniton had come to meet him and as he went towards it he saw that the mare in it was fresh and fidgetty and that the groom was not managing her well. He saw too that the only trap in sight was a pony-cart with a girl in it and that the girl had an open book in her hands and was reading. He climbed into his seat, took the reins from his groom and let the mare go, when, to his annoyance, the old pony in the cart turned slowly across his path and in front of the station gates. Oliver stopped the mare who reared. The girl dropped her book, looked alarmed, but did nothing.

" Get your pony out of the way," he shouted.

" The lady's reins are on the ground, sir," said his groom.

" Jump off and see to them then," said Oliver.

The man did so, put them into the girl's unwilling hands, led the pony back against the railings and looked at his new master for orders.

" Are you all right now ? " Oliver called to the girl.

" No, I'm not," she said and the colour came into her face : the colour of vexation and distress.

" What's the matter ? " said Oliver.

" How am I to get home ? "

" Why not in the pony-cart ? S-sh—quiet—quiet, my beauty. What's her name ? "

" It's Miss Westlake, sir," said the groom.

" I mean the mare," said Oliver in a tone of exasperation for the mare was plunging into her collar, eager to be off.

" Beg pardon, sir—Miss Hawke named her Golliwog, but we calls her Golly."

" You should never let the reins out of your hands," Oliver said addressing the girl again.

" But I've never had them in my hands," she told him. " I can't drive."

" How did you get here ? "

" The under-gardener drove me ; but he went off to the town for his bicycle and must be back at Highwood long since. I expected my sister by this train, but she hasn't come and there is no other from Elmstone to-night."

" The Loudons live at Highwood."

" Yes, I'm Mrs. Loudon's sister."

" I'm Oliver Hawke."

" Are you ? "

The girl's voice expressed interest and her wide eyes seemed to compare the reality of his presence with some picture of him in her mind. She was a very pretty girl and not as chattering and self sufficient as he expected an English girl to be to-day. But while she watched him she forgot what he had just told her

and dropped the reins in order to take up a hand-bag lying on the opposite seat. Then, seeing his face, she realised what she had done and turned as red as a rose.

" I'll drive you home if you'll let me," he said, " my groom can follow on with the pony."

" It takes you out of your way."

" Never mind that. My mare wants work."

The girl looked at the high dog-cart as a town dweller might look at a hayrick he was suddenly expected to ascend : with hesitation and dislike.

" Perhaps I could follow in the pony cart," she said timidly. " He is a very quiet old pony."

" Yes, I see he is ; but I'd rather you were here," said Oliver. " Then I shall know what is happening."

" Go to her head while Miss Westlake gets up," he called to his groom and taking both reins in his right hand he held out his left to Christian, caught her wrist as she put her foot on the lower step and helped her into the seat beside him.

" Keep as close to us as you can," he said to his groom ; and then gave the mare rein. She was out of the yard and well on her way before the pony-cart emerged from the station.

" This hill will take the edge off," said Oliver looking at the long steep one just ahead of them.

" I wish I could drive," said Christian.

" How is it you can't ? As a rule girls in the country—— "

" But I lived in London, till a month ago. I've never even been in a dog-cart before."

" You didn't want to come to-day, did you ? "

" I'm much obliged to you for taking me home," she said courteously.

" Are you going to stay long at Highwood ? "

" I'm living there. I've nowhere else to live."

It had not occurred to Oliver before ; but he noticed now that the girl was in deep mourning.

" Major Loudon was not married when I left England fifteen years ago," he commented.

" He has been married eight years," said Christian.

" Then I suppose you've often stayed here before ? "

" No. Never. I had not seen Highwood till I came there to live in June."

The mare having come to the top of the short steep hill saw a long ribbon of white road ahead and broke into a canter. For a minute or two Oliver was engaged in snubbing her into a trot again.

Christian watched him without understanding but with exhilaration. It was true that she had never been in a dog-cart before and she had never sat beside a man who could drive. For her life at home with a widowed invalid mother had been unusually circumscribed and secluded. This was an adventure and out of the crowding impressions gathering in her mind the one most with her was of the strong grip of Oliver's hand as he helped her into her place. She had not been very deft or quick about getting up, but with his left hand only he had steadied her and saved her from stumbling. She remembered it dreamily as they whizzed past the dusty hedgerows and the fields behind on which the peace of evening was descending beneath a clear summer sky. She could see Oliver's profile clearly but not his eyes. They looked straight ahead at his horse. He was a tallish sparely built man with plain features and he had a curt way with him that was not balm to your feelings. Christian wondered how

Clare would get on with him for Clare was used to be flattered and adored by men. But probably his manner would change to her. Christian sighed.

"Don't you like living in the country then?" said Oliver when the mare had settled down to her work again.

"Yes, I like it; but I wish I could do country things. I can't even play tennis or row or swim."

"You can learn. How old are you? Sixteen?"

"I'm eighteen," said Christian indignantly. "I shall be nineteen in October. Most people take me for older."

"My sister Jane is seventeen," said Oliver, perceiving that he had blundered but not knowing quite how to make good. "She wants to leave school."

"Naturally."

"It may be natural. I wanted to leave school when I was ten. But it's inconvenient. I shall probably keep her there another year."

Christian did not exactly speak; but she gave a little inarticulate gasp that he interpreted; for she was remembering his hold on her wrist and feeling the hard strength of it in the light of his words.

"I suppose you think I'm a brute," he said. "You forget that I don't know my sister. I've not seen her since she was two."

"Don't you want to know her?"

"Not particularly. Of course I shall have to. She has invited herself to Maniton for Christmas."

"Maniton is her home."

Oliver recognised more or less unwillingly that Christian had said something he ought to have considered when he thought of Jane; but he had not done

so. Since he had succeeded to Maniton he had always thought of it as his property and as the home of his childhood. The sister at school was so much a stranger to him that he had forgotten her claims on Maniton: claims of habit and affection that he was bound to admit.

"I suppose I must let her come," he said, "but I wish she was ten years older."

III

As the dog-cart stopped at the door of Highwood, Major Loudon came out of his house and saw with some surprise that his young sister-in-law had arrived in it and was sitting next to the driver. He knew the dog-cart and he knew the mare and like everyone else in the neighbourhood he knew that the master of Maniton was coming home to-day. But why did he come by way of Highwood with Christian in tow and where was the Major's own pony-cart? There was always one question that the Major asked himself when anything odd happened in his household and that was what Clare had to do with it. He asked it now while he greeted Oliver Hawke and thanked him for bringing Christian home.

"But where did you meet?" he said.

"At the station," said Oliver and then left Christian to tell her own tale.

"You see I was alone in the pony-cart," she began, "and I can't drive the pony. I didn't know how I was to get home."

"But why were you alone in the pony-cart?"

"Clare was to come by the 5.30. She must have missed her train."

"Clare arrived an hour ago in the Faversham's car," said the Major.

A momentary silence ensued and then Christian stood up ; but as she did so the mare started forward and she would have fallen if Oliver had not caught her arm. She thought he looked annoyed ; and she was positive that he set her down for a little fool, which was distressing but not to be wondered at.

" Wait a minute," he said to the girl. " Now then, Loudon, catch her ! "

Christian helped by her brother-in-law got down face forwards instead of as she should have done with her face towards the dog-cart. Oliver watched them and saw her miss the second step and stumble anyhow into Major Loudon's arms. Luckily her brother-in-law was ready for her ; and when she had gone into the house he turned to Oliver and urged him to come in too until his groom arrived with the pony-cart.

" I'll send someone to hold your mare and put a blanket on her," he said and turned off towards his stable yard.

Oliver did not want to be delayed any longer. He wanted to get home. His cold made his head heavy and he felt the chills of slight fever out here in the air. His desire was to dine as soon as possible, to smoke a quiet pipe and go to bed. The racket of London was in his bones and the fag of a fortnight's late hours. The last thing he felt inclined for was to enter this house and make himself pleasant to the mistress of it, who would probably be a replica of her sister but older and if possible duller. You could almost bet on Loudon having married a dull woman. He would. However Oliver wanted his groom because, for all he knew, there would be no one else at Maniton to take charge of the mare.

" He's a man with a temper," thought Christian as she watched him come into the drawing-room a few minutes later. " He is angry because of all this delay and wishes I'd been buried before he met me. But Clare isn't what he expected. He thought she would be quiet and dull—like me. I'm not dull, but he thinks I am. At least, he doesn't think about me at all now that he has seen Clare. She has startled him."

This was true. Oliver was startled by Mrs. Loudon : so much startled and attracted that he forgot his aching head and his shivers as he sat beside the wood fire and talked to her. She was unexpected in that quiet house and as the mate of good old Loudon who even fifteen years ago had been square and slow. She was gorgeous. That was the word for her. She was a blazer. There were no shades and reticences about her. Black hair, full scarlet lips, lustrous cheeks, a creamy skin, brown eyes with light rings in them, and a smile as warm and easy as sunshine. Where had Loudon captured such a butterfly and how did he manage to keep her here ? She must find it dull.

" Fifteen years ! " she was saying to him. " You've not seen Maniton for fifteen years ! Then you'll find the trees and shrubs have grown a bit. Otherwise I don't suppose a stick or a stone has been changed."

" I'm glad of that," said Oliver.

" I'm the only new thing in this house," Clare went on, " and I've been here eight years. Christian came a month ago, but she is not as new as I am. She ought to have married John, but unluckily when he turned up she was still in the nursery. Don't look so shocked, darling. You're not annoyed with me, are you, because I came back in the Favershams' car instead

of with you in the pony cart ? It all turned out for the best you see. Things do if you leave them alone."

" It gave Mr. Hawke a good deal of trouble," said Christian who had not spoken a word since Oliver came in. She seemed to him shy to the verge of stupidity and beside her brilliant sister she looked plain. Her heavy unbecoming hat hid her hair as completely as her badly cut coat and skirt hid her figure. She had beautiful eyes, but there was neither challenge nor laughter in them. They were sad, like her manners. That there should be any tie of blood between the two young women was difficult to believe. They were as diverse as a sparrow and a peacock ; and who looks at a sparrow when the peacock spreads its tail ? Clare was always lucky in little ways ; lucky or clever. She had dressed early to-night when she came back tired and chilly in the car and so Oliver saw her for the first time as Christian had seen her on arrival, in the rose and gold brocade. Her shoes were rose and gold too, and when she crossed her pretty feet she showed a good deal of silk stocking. Emeralds and diamonds flashed on her white hands. Pearls were clasped warmly round her neck. She herself was as sweet as roses after her bath ; and on the table at her side she had set a bowl of violets that scented the air close to her. Oliver hardly answered Christian when she made the remark about giving him trouble and he had no eyes for her even when he had to get up and say good-bye. His eyes and his attention were both given to Clare and he accepted her invitation to dine at Highwood next day with eagerness.

" How did you get on with him ? " she said to Christian when the two men had left the room.

"He took me for sixteen. He talked to me as if I were twelve," answered Christian.

"You are younger than your age. I suppose it's the life you've led—always glued to books and music. When I was nearly nineteen I'd had ever so many little affairs and proposals. I don't suppose you've had one yet."

"Not one," said Christian.

She was not likely to have one either as long as she lived in the same house with Clare. She saw that next day when Oliver came to dinner. Clare monopolised him and he liked it. He told stories about his life in the East and addressed them to her; and she described the various new houses in the immediate neighbourhood and the people who lived in them. The old houses and their families he remembered, but he had heard little of their histories for fifteen years. His brother had not been much of a correspondent he said. He did not mention Jane; and Christian, all eyes and ears, noticed that and interpreted the omission in her own way. He thought a girl of his sister's age negligible. Now that she sat opposite him in a well lighted room she learned more about him than she had done yesterday driving beside him in the dusk. Evening dress suited him, he was well groomed and in spite of his rough life his hands were not rough. She had known yesterday that he was rather tall, spare and plain; at least he was plain compared with a species of Greek God who had crinkly hair and a beautiful profile and whose photograph was signed Owen. It had a place of honour in the drawing-room and Clare had whispered to Christian in a confidential moment that for a long while Owen had been her best boy.

Christian had not invited the confidence, did not know how to interpret it and shuddered secretly at the phrase which struck her as amazingly vulgar. But Clare said and did a thousand things that Christian could not imitate because they would have jarred on her taste. That was partly why she was often as silent as Virgilia in her step-sister's presence; and she supposed it was why Clare twitted her with being Victorian and middle-class. As a rule she did not much mind being extinguished; but she was not enjoying it to-night. Certainly Mr. Hawke was plain. His upper lip was too long and his chin was long too. He had a clean-shaven face, a weather-beaten skin and light grey eyes. But you did not think about his looks when you were with him. You thought about what he was saying or doing and you wished he would say things to you. He had an agreeable voice and his eyes twinkled when he felt amused. It was unfortunate that he was so old and thought girls of seventeen and eighteen so young. Christian did not feel young because she had lived in intimate seclusion with her mother and had not made friends of her own years; and besides, six months of anxiety and nursing, her mother's last days and her death in pain had aged the girl; and Clare was not the person to remove these tragic impressions. She had not enough sympathy or imagination. Her good nature was too facile for difficult places; and in her hurry to snatch enjoyment out of life she wanted companions of her own calibre. Christian was inoffensive but mopey; and her virtue was her fellowship with John. Those two quiet people had formed an alliance that suited Clare exactly, for it left her free. When she rose from table to-night

her manner was electric and alive to an extent Christian had not seen yet ; and as she turned over her fashion paper she was preoccupied and smiling.

" He is going to be her best boy," Christian thought to herself. " I wonder if he knows it and just exactly what it means and how John likes it."

" Won't you play to us, darling ? " said Clare to her step-sister when the two men came in ; and Christian sat down to the piano as she had done every evening lately. Her music invariably sent John to sleep, but he vowed he enjoyed it and heard every note. Clare pretended to be musical but could not take in Christian with her pretensions. Nevertheless every night after dinner Christian sat at the piano and appeased her own mourning spirit with her melodies. To-night she would rather not have played but did not know how to refuse. She had heard Oliver say at dinner that he could not tell one tune from another and she feared to bore him. However, she soon made up her mind that she need have no such fear for while she played he talked to Clare ; in a low voice so as not to disturb the musician but without ceasing. Christian wondered what he talked about, but if she stopped for a moment Clare instantly begged her to go on and assured her they were enjoying it so much ; and John snored. He did not wake till Oliver's dog-cart was announced at half-past ten and then he said that he had heard every note of Christian's music and every word his wife and his guest had been saying. Christian saw something in Oliver's eyes that seemed to hope not ; but he looked amused too and said he had fallen asleep himself last night when he had sat alone.

" You must get a wife to sit opposite you and

entertain you with her charming conversation," said Major Loudon whose badinage was apt to be about a century behind his times; and Oliver left amidst the laughter the suggestion roused, coming as it did from the Major.

IV

OLIVER was learning to manage his property and it took him all his time. At least it should have done. Every day there seemed to be new points to consider and more things to do. On the whole he found it in good order, for his brother had been brought up to the position and had filled it well according to his lights. Raymond had never been out of England and he had not been as well off as the new owner. Most of the cottages wanted repair and new ones were badly needed; but no building had been done for a generation. Oliver had made such a good thing of his rubber plantations that he had cleared sixty thousand pounds before he left the F.M.S., and he brought back not only his fortune but his ideas and his business habits. His farms were mostly let to tenants whose methods, though he knew little of farming, seemed to him incredibly old fashioned and unscientific; but about a hundred acres went with Maniton and at Maniton he could do as he liked. Raymond had never employed an agent and Oliver did not want one. He meant to do his own work and deal with his own men. Since Raymond's death a year ago the estate had been more or less mismanaged by a firm of solicitors at Granfield and the men employed at Maniton; some of whom were worthy of their hire and some of whom were not. Messrs. Leeson and Bluett soon found that

they had an astute man of business to deal with now, while the staff found itself gasping with surprise and weeded out. In short, Oliver was so busy that he forgot to ask himself whether or not he liked living in the old country again or whether he meant to stay there. He was rapidly becoming interested in his work and when he was not at work Clare was at hand to amuse him.

Lately she had been almost too much and too easily at hand. He liked her very well though he had over and over again caught her out in little evasions and untruths. But he supposed women had a different standard of honesty from men and that she was probably a white woman according to her own canons. She was certainly beguiling, but he would not like to have been responsible for her. There were legends about her in the neighbourhood, he found, legends of her extravagance and indiscretions. People were inclined to pity Major Loudon and to hint at his saint-like patience, which, however, might break if tried too far. There had been a great many admirers before Captain Conway, it seemed ; but Captain Conway had been a scandal. Always in the lady's pocket. Saint-like patience in a husband could be carried too far and cease to be admirable. Oliver was given to understand that if the Major had taken a stick to both parties he would have been more respected. Besides, her extravagance was notorious. Captain Conway had been a man of means and everyone guessed that he had come to the rescue at times ; but Granfield was not a neighbourhood where such goings on were countenanced. It smiled when it heard about outrageous young women in London and elsewhere ; but it did

not want any in its midst. Clare set a bad example to wives and daughters dressing on meagre allowances because she dressed as if you could get fine clothes by cracking nuts ; like the heroines in fairy tales. She seemed always to know and to get the fashions of to-morrow instead of being content with those of yesterday, which did well enough for Granfield ; and her odds and ends, her hats and stockings, her neck wear and her umbrella handles were most upsetting to young Mrs. Bluett, for instance, who had dressed on thirty pounds a year when she was a girl and was allowed forty as a married woman. Clare had given thirty-five pounds for the rose and gold brocade, had worn it to the Hunt Ball and on two or three other ceremonial occasions ; had had it slightly altered by her maid and now called it an old rag. But this recital of facts made no effect on Mr. Bluett when his wife presented him with a milliner's bill she could not pay. On the contrary. He flew into a passion, asked if such a pack of fools as women were could ever expect the vote and told Oliver some of the stories afloat concerning the mistress of Highwood. For he feared that Oliver was being taken on as a successor to Conway. It was known that he was constantly at the house and he had been seen with Clare on various occasions of a kind to set the tongues of Granfield wagging. The Bluetts had come upon them in a tucked away creek where they had come themselves for privacy ; the Rector, calling at Maniton, had found Clare at tea there with Oliver and very much at home ; and twice lately, on market day, Clare had driven into the town in Oliver's dog-cart. That would not happen again because he had just got rid of the dog-cart and bought

a car; but a car would certainly increase Oliver's chances of succeeding Owen Conway. Clare would enjoy having a car practically at her disposal.

Certainly, Clare would have done, if Oliver had been an Owen; but Oliver was not. Owen's large melting eyes and long eyelashes had been an index to his soul; and presumably Oliver's rather small alert light grey ones were an index too; and told a different story. Clare was strongly attracted by him in spite of his plain features, but she did not feel as sure of him as she could wish yet. He was attentive and friendly, but anyone at any moment might have heard all he said to her. He admired her. He sought her society. He hardly looked at another woman when she was present. But he kept his head; and Clare wanted him to lose it.

She had an uneasy sense of a sane hard side to his nature that would never be fascinated or blinded. He liked her, but he appraised her; and he was not going to make a fool of himself. He had really been rather annoyed when the Rector found her at tea at Maniton, although he had been careful not to show it. Christian had been asked with her, but Clare had not wanted Christian so she had not conveyed the invitation. If this came out by accident it would not matter. The members of the two households were so intimate that at every meeting some arrangement would be made for the next meeting; and it was impossible to remember these trifling matters exactly. Clare's memory conveniently retained what suited her and forgot what did not; and she had forgotten to tell Christian that Oliver expected her at Maniton that particular Thursday. Moreover she had told a fib at lunch, said she had a headache and could not go to

Granfield with the Major in the pony-cart and when he had departed had slipped through the garden to the creek and rowed herself across the water to Maniton. Christian had seen her start, but that could not be helped. Christian never told tales.

As for the Major, he liked Oliver uncommonly himself and could not see too much of him. In fact, manœuvre on Clare's part was often necessary in order to get Oliver by himself and as a rule he did not help her much. That in itself was a proof to her that he had not lost his head ; but she still hoped that he would. She wished it would happen before Jane came at Christmas because she did not like Jane and Jane did not like her.

With this end in view one evening shortly before Christmas she put on a new frock in which her dazzling colours were even more dazzling than usual. Light leaf green it was and embroidered with barbaric hues and how she kept it on her shoulders no one knew. The crude tints of it would not have suited most women, but the brilliancy of Clare's red, white and black shouted down the green so that she looked, said Oliver, like a ripe apple amongst its leaves. As for the embroideries they became suave and harmonious in such a setting. Clare's arms and shoulders were as white as ivory and as glistening as Madonna lilies ; and though her hands were not beautiful they were well kept and flashing with gems.

" You want a scarf or a shawl with it," Christian had said when she saw the new frock and Clare had laughed at her, called her darling and told her she was mid-Victorian and old fashioned. Then she went downstairs and found John dressed but shivering over

the library fire and wishing he was not obliged to turn out into the winter night in an open pony-cart because he had taken a chill that afternoon. Clare knew John's chills. Nine out of ten never came to anything and when she wanted to dispose of them she took his temperature with a clinical thermometer, assured him he was below normal and heard no more about it. Because John's simple medical theory decided that if you felt chilly and had a temperature you were about to have influenza probably followed by heart failure or pneumonia ; but if you felt chilly and were not feverish nothing happened. You just sat over a fire had a glass of something hot and recovered. Clare had to make up her mind quickly which sort of chill John was to have to-night and decided that the normal temperature was safer. She had once doctored a thermometer with the aid of a hot water tap, but she did not like doing it because John was such a fidget and as often as not looked to see if it was well shaken down before he put it in his mouth. Besides, if he was officially ' up ' he would feel much worse at once and think her heartless and neglectful to go out.

" No, darling, you're not a bit feverish," she said, when she had found the thermometer, and while John had it under his tongue chattered to him about the heavy frost expected by Ditchfield the gardener and the bitter cold drive they would have to Maniton and the comfort a telephone to Granfield would be to them.

" For instance to-night we might have had a closed car or even a cab," she pointed out. " Then you could have gone."

" I'm going," said John in a gloomy voice. " I don't feel fit for it, but Oliver expects us and I must go."

" It would be much worse for you to have rheumatic fever for instance than for Oliver to have an empty place at his dinner-table," said Clare. " There is reason in all things and Oliver is a reasonable man. I shall tell him I left you in bed."

" But I'm not in bed."

" You will be in ten minutes. I'll give orders about something to eat upstairs. You won't want much."

" I'm not sure that I feel quite bad enough for that," remonstrated John.

" You look rather bad, darling. I noticed it directly I came in. I noticed that drawn look you have about the eyes sometimes and it always means you want a little rest and care. I'll tell them to make you a roaring fire and take you up the whisky and the small copper kettle and I just remember that there is a partridge for dinner because poor Christian—— "

" Isn't Christian going either ? " exclaimed John who liked the picture, but was still hesitating between duty and delight.

" No, darling. That makes it easier. Oliver's table won't be upset."

" Is it a dinner-party then ? I didn't know."

" I don't know either ; but I'd always rather be disappointed by a pair than by a singleton. Christian has one of her bad headaches and I've persuaded her to go to bed too. I shall be back early."

" You must take James then. You can't drive about at night alone."

Clare nodded sweetly to her husband and slipped out of the room. A few minutes later the wheels of the pony-cart came up to the front door and drove away again. Perhaps as much as ten minutes elapsed before

the library door opened and Christian dressed for dinner, came into the room.

" Isn't Clare down yet ? " she said. " We ought to start."

" Clare has gone, nearly a quarter of an hour ago," said John staring at his sister-in-law. Christian did not look as if she had a bad headache or meant to spend the evening in bed ; but she changed colour when she heard that she had been left behind.

" She said she had persuaded you to go to bed," pursued John.

" She tried to at tea-time, but I said I would see. I had a headache then and went up to lie down."

" That is what she told me—that you had a headache," said John, and Christian observed that he spoke eagerly ; as if he was glad to find that his wife's information had been correct.

" We had better have dinner together," said Christian.

" I have a chill," said John. " I did say I would go to bed, but I feel much better now. If I had a second pony-cart we might go to Maniton after all, but it would take too long to walk and I don't like crossing the creek these dark winter nights. How surprised Clare will be when she comes back and finds us both up and playing chess. You are sure your headache is better, my dear ? "

" Quite sure," said Christian.

V

"BUT where are the others?" said Oliver when Clare only was shown in to the library at Maniton where he awaited his guests. The old butler, Wickham, had closed the door behind her and she found herself alone with Oliver with a long evening before them.

"Am I late?" she began, well knowing that she was not. "I nearly didn't come at all, but John said that wouldn't be fair to you and that he could get on without me for an hour or two. I think it's only a chill and not influenza. However, he has gone to bed, poor darling! It seemed rather heartless to come, but John said that as you expected the Favershams— "

"I don't expect the Favershams," said Oliver.

"I thought you didn't, but John met Mr. Faversham in Granfield yesterday and something was said about you and dining—— "

"I go there to-morrow."

"That's enough for John. He is the haziest person I know. Poor Christian has one of her bad headaches. They were both so frightfully disappointed. They love coming here. We all do."

Clare had sunk into one of the comfortable shabby old chairs at the corner of the big granite hearth on

which a log fire was burning. In the sober room lined with calf bound books and sparsely furnished she looked more than ever like a splendid butterfly and Oliver enjoyed her colours. Since he was eighteen he had lived amongst men who took the goods the gods provided as lightly as Latins do ; and he himself had been acquainted with lovely Thais in many guises and many climes. Clare amused him and was agreeable to the eye. She did not turn his head or touch his heart, but he was ready to pay her court gallantly and artificially. As long as she was satisfied with that he would carry on, but if she wanted more he would not have it to give. He did not mean to sound any depths either of passion or danger and to-night he was not over pleased by her coming to his house alone. Her frock was brazen and he wondered that a man like Loudon allowed his wife to wear it. However that was not his business and her shoulders were lovely. It was only when old Wickham was in the room that, like Christian, he wished she had a shawl.

They both ate an excellent dinner, drank some good champagne with it and felt that the world was a pleasant place, when Wickham, having placed the port on the table, left them to themselves. Clare did not drink port, but she liked sweets and candied fruits and Oliver knowing this had provided them. When they got up and went back to the library he took a little silver box of chocolates with him for her and set them at her side. He did not stay behind with his port to-night as there was no other man to entertain, and in the library he did not sit down at once, but stood on the hearth-rug and talked to his amiable guest. Clare's idea of conversation was elementary. She was

not an intelligent or an instructed woman, but she could ripple on incessantly about the small topics in which she took an interest and she looked so pretty and agreeable while she did this that most men were willing to listen for a time. After a time, if they were intelligent themselves they were apt to fall away ; but Oliver had not got to that stage yet. He listened to a pretty woman much as any grown up person watches a kitten, with pleasure and indulgence. In his serious hours he did not think of her and in his idle ones the outside view was enough. Besides he had not been in the East for fifteen years without being insensibly affected by the eastern point of view. He would however have been very angry with anyone who told him this.

Clare did not think about his views except in their relation to herself. She did not mind how he regarded women in general as long as he responded to her ; for in her own way she was making the advances. Her whole live glittering person made them as she sat in his shabby old chair, entertained him with her glib tongue and looked at him from under her long curling eyelashes. She was more in earnest than usual and more in love. She wished she was not married and could marry Oliver. He would not have stood her nonsense as poor old John did, but that idea only increased her respect for him. Besides, after all, he was a man and where is the man who cannot be bamboozled by a pretty woman ? Clare, in a short but triumphant life, had never met him. As the evening drew to its close she felt that she was making progress with Oliver for he sat down near her and seemed to be as contented with the passing hour as she was herself.

Wickham coming in softly at half past ten to announce the lady's pony-cart retreated hurriedly and rattled the handle of the door before he came in again ; for he had seen that which he should not have seen and that which shocked him. The lady's shoulders were certainly lovely. He was man enough himself to see that. But the lady was married and his master's head had been nearer those lovely shoulders than it need have been. The lady ought to have known better. Wickham did not say to himself that Oliver ought to have known better. He did not blame Oliver.

Nor did Oliver blame himself. The lady had come to him with taradiddles and evasions in her wake and on her beautiful red lips ; she had come arrayed for dalliance ; and she showed him unblushingly that he had found favour in her eyes. He enjoyed the evening very well indeed and had no scruples about his share in it. He felt sorry for John Loudon whom he liked and who could not keep his wife in order ; but he recognised that Clare would be as difficult to keep in order as a live slippery fish is to hold. A man made an irreparable mistake when he married such a woman. Even his undefined relations with Clare had difficult moments as time went on ; for she lied as a child does, hardly knowing that she lied and unashamed when she was found out.

One afternoon soon after she had dined there she looked in at tea-time in order, she said, to make some future arrangement for a little dance she wanted to give at Christmas. John was being tiresome about it.

" What is poor John doing now ? " said Oliver drawing a little closer to a fire of logs that were not as hot yet as he would have liked ; for he was feeling

the cold of the English winter a good deal already.

"You always take his part," said Clare. "I wish women were as clannish as men are."

She sighed.

"Is Christian being tiresome too then?" said Oliver. "Perhaps I had better give the dance myself."

"It isn't the dance," said Clare sighing again. "It's other things."

Oliver looked at the lady meditatively. Her shoulders were covered to-day: covered with dark blue velvet and ermine; and he had never seen the ermine before. There was a stole and big muff; both extraordinarily becoming. Certainly Clare knew how to dress, but he had reason to think that she did not always know how to pay her bills. At least that was said of her by the gossiping tongues of Granfield. But perhaps the ermine was a Christmas present from John, given shortly before Christmas because the weather was so cold.

"A hundred a year is all I have of my own," said Clare. "It isn't much, is it?"

"I've no idea what a girl wants to spend," said Oliver. "I must find out because I have to make Jane some allowance."

"Christian has five hundred a year."

"Jane will have nothing like that. I thought fifty would be enough."

"For her sweets and cigarettes?"

"For all her personal expenses."

"It isn't anything. This fur cost forty pounds. The bill for it came by the afternoon post. Here it is. I got it from Suzanne and she has turned so disagreeable lately. You see she insists on my either returning it

or paying for it at once. I've a good mind to give her up. But I suppose I can't unless I pay her."

The bill fluttering in Clare's hands passed into Oliver's, who looked at it and then put it back on the muff for the moment. So the fur was not a present from John; and Owen was over the hills and far away Oliver began to reconstruct little scenes of this kind with his predecessor and to wonder whether the tongues of Granfield were as malicious as Clare said they were.

"Bills are the devil," he said. "I hope Jane won't get into debt."

"I don't see how she can help it if you only allow her fifty pounds a year; and a hundred isn't much better. We can't go about in sackcloth, can we?"

"I suppose not," said Oliver, stroking the ermine muff which was very near him now. "At least we should lose a good deal if you did."

"I think Christian might have lent me the money, don't you? I promised her I would pay it back after Christmas. I shall have my quarter's allowance then and I always get one or two presents of money."

"Why did she refuse?"

"She said she had none."

"That seems a good reason. Perhaps she has been buying furs for herself."

"No; but she takes John's advice; and directly money comes in he invests it for her. I call it absurd. After all what is money for?"

Oliver laughed and looked at the glistening ermine so near Clare's lovely face. She was as irresponsible as a child and nearly as ignorant; as frankly selfish and as irresistible. She wore a bunch of Parma violets

near her stole to-day, and he stooped his head towards them because their fragrance seemed hers and he liked to inhale it.

" Why can't you pay the bill at New Year when you have the money ? " he asked.

Clare looked down at the flashing rings on her hands which were outside her muff ; and then she looked up at him, coaxing and smiling.

" If I did I should be left without a penny," she said. " I was going to pay Christian back by degrees, ten pounds at a time. I could do that easily."

" Could you ? "

" Yes. I'm most particular about money. I think one ought to be, don't you ? "

" Oh ! Of course," said Oliver. " How sweet these violets are ! "

Clare took them out of her stole and began to pin them into the button hole of his coat.

" But I liked them where they were," said he and put the bill for the ermine in his pocket.

" Why do you do that ? " she asked.

" I'm going to be a sister to you," he said, and pinned the violets on the stole again. Wickham did not feel shocked this time when he came in with the tea-tray and found his master sitting knee to knee with Mrs. Loudon over the fire. He was getting used to things ; but he wondered to Mrs. Stoughton the housekeeper, how Miss Jane would take it when she came home.

" There'll be feathers flying," he prophesied. " Miss Jane can't abide Mrs. Loudon. She as good as told me so in the summer when Captain Smallways deserted to Highwood ; and she'll expect to be mistress of the

house till the master marries ; which I wish he would do. I'm not straitlaced, but I don't like these goings on. You never know where they'll end and if I was in the witness box a lot of things would come out that are better kept in. A woman like Mrs. Loudon ought to be under lock and key as they are in Turkey and other places. These foreigners show a lot of sense in some ways. If she belonged to me I'd take a stick to her."

" I expect you'd be about what other men are," said Mrs. Stoughton who was a widow and a cynic. " Just a bit o' wax on a summer day. I never met the man yet who could stand up to fluff if it was young and captivating. We're called the weaker vessels but more often than not we're the potters and you're the clay ! "

" Nonsense ! " said Wickham.

VI

THE most disconcerting thing about Clare was her inconsequence. At least Christian found this so. She could never be sure that her step-sister would tell everyone the same lie and the results were sometimes embarrassing. For instance Mrs. Bluett had alluded to Christian's generosity in giving Clare the ermine stole and muff for her birthday and she did it in John's presence.

" I wish I had a sister like that," she had said and it seemed to Christian that she watched for signs of dissent or surprise. But John and Christian preserved a blank exterior till they were well away from the house, and then John said meditatively :

" I wonder where those furs did come from ? Of course I know you could not have given them, my dear. You would not have had the money as long ago as Clare's birthday last June. But Clare tells me that women have an elaborate system of exchange amongst themselves and that she often adds to her wardrobe in this way. I should not like to wear other people's clothes myself, but I suppose it is largely done."

" I suppose it is," said Christian, and then led John's ideas in other directions. Luckily this was easy. But when she got back to Highwood she went into the drawing-room, found Clare sitting there and tackled her.

" You told Mrs. Bluett that I gave you your ermine on your birthday," she said bluntly.

Clare, who was studying the last number of "Vogue," looked up from its enthralling pages unperturbed and only half attentive.

" Never, darling," she said. " How could I ? "

" I don't know how you could ; but apparently you did ; and you said I gave it you on your birthday last June when, as John knows, I had no money."

" What cats women are ! " said Clare. " Is John annoyed ? "

" He is puzzled. He is very loyal to you, but you can hardly expect—— "

" What can't I expect, sweetheart ? "

" Well—that he should stand things. What is the truth about that ermine ? "

Clare's eyes opened to their fullest extent and their expression was amused and innocent.

" It just came in a cardboard box," she said. " I ordered it."

" But who has paid for it ? "

" One doesn't pay for things the moment they arrive. At least I don't. I should never have a penny in my pocket that way."

" Well—I wish you wouldn't drag me in, Clare. I should hate to give you away and I hate telling lies."

" I know you do, darling. You're a little compendium of all the virtues ; not a bit like me. But God made us both. I look rather nice when I wear the ermine, don't I ? Even blind old John noticed it."

" I think you trust too much to John's blindness," said Christian.

" Oh ! I know John. Haven't I been married to him for eight years ? He doesn't like all my ways, but he shuts his eyes. What else can he do ? "

" He might put his foot down. Sometimes I wish he would."

" Darling, you're so touching and old fashioned—— "

Clare would have said more if her step-sister would have listened ; but Christian went out of the room. It angered her to be called old fashioned when she objected to Clare's trickeries. In her opinion truth and honour were not subject to fashion. They were unchanging and eternal ; and as binding on women as on men. She hated the assumption that women might lie and be forgiven because they were women. It was an insulting assumption and could only be held by men who had a low opinion of women ; men like Oliver Hawke.

It was true that Clare had asked Christian to lend her fifty pounds soon after the ermine came and that Christian had not such a sum to lend. Until her mother died she had not even had a dress allowance and very rarely as much as five pounds of her own. After her mother's death Major Loudon took her money affairs in hand and there had been the usual law's delay in settling them. He had told her that when they were settled she would have about five hundred a year and that she had better learn how to manage a bank account and a cheque book. He had suggested, too, that she would not need five hundred a year for her personal expenses at Highwood and that she ought to invest part of her income when it began to come in ; for Major Loudon was a good business man and thrifty about money. At the same time he refused to let Christian pay for her board and lodging in his house. Clare who was not thrifty thought this absurd and made up for it by borrowing from Christian when she could ; while Christian who would have been willing to lend, or rather give, in any case, was all the

more willing because she felt that she owed a great deal to her brother-in-law. But she did not see how she could ever lend large sums to Clare without his knowledge since he helped her with her accounts and often had a look at her bank book.

"There is no difficulty about that," said Clare. "You can either take the money out for yourself or pay anyone who is dunning me and say it was one of your own bills."

"That is just what I could not do," said Christian.

"Why not? It would be kind, and you said the other day that you agreed with someone who said that everyone ought to be kind and make his neighbour happy. I'm your neighbour and I hate being in debt, but what am I to do?"

"Keep out of it," said Christian.

"Do be reasonable, darling. How can I when every quarter I owe two or three times as much as John doles out. I read somewhere the other day that the freedom of women depended more on money than anything and I think it is so true. If I had plenty of money I could do as I liked."

"I should say that you did pretty much as you liked as it is."

"But John can be very annoying sometimes. I positively dread New Year. Of course I've had to order one or two little things for Christmas——"

Clare's eyes were fixed inquiringly on her step-sister, but Christian did not respond as warmly as she might have done. She was thinking of the Christmas parties herself and of her one and only decidedly frumpish black evening frock. Perhaps it would be kind to lend the money she had in hand to Clare, but it would

be more amusing to spend some of it on herself. It would be more satisfactory too. Lending money to Clare was like pouring water through a sieve and Christian hardly enjoyed doing it. So far she had managed to live amicably with her step-sister, but she had no illusions about her. She knew why Clare had hurried off to Maniton the other night without waiting for her and why she had beguiled John into staying at home ; but she had refrained from reproaches. What would have been the use of them ? Clare was in love with Oliver and Oliver was presumably in love with Clare and it was wrong but thrilling : too thrilling for Christian's peace of mind. Because she found herself thinking of Oliver and watching him. As he took scant notice of her it was easy to watch him and when he was not there it was easy to imagine him a lover. At least she thought so.

In Christian's bedroom there was a long glass in which she could see herself from head to foot and many a disconcerting shock it had given her since her arrival. She had been brought up not to look in glasses more than was strictly necessary and rebuked by her austere mother if she showed any signs of personal vanity ; but it was impossible to look much at Clare and yet remain unconscious of her own deficiencies. At Highwood, Christian had learned many things about herself that she had not known before and one was that all her clothes were unbecoming. She did her hair badly too and she wore thick boots and stockings on the wrong occasions. All her life, she had been taught that these things were of no importance compared with qualities of conduct and character ; but now life itself was teaching her a different lesson. She wished to appear

before Oliver arrayed like the lilies of the field and find out whether he noticed any difference in her.

"I want some new clothes myself," she said to Clare who opened her eyes wide and showed surprise.

"But none of your things are six months old," she said, "and you told me only yesterday that you had often worn a frock three or four years."

"I didn't enjoy doing it."

"Didn't you, darling? Now I thought you had a soul above clothes. I'm sure John believes you have. He is always comparing me with you, to my disadvantage."

"But the looking-glass doesn't," said Christian.

Clare blinked and relapsed into her fashion-paper, one that talked of inexpensive fur coats costing five hundred and a thousand pounds. The sums she spent were paltry compared with what men showered on other women, neither younger nor more seductive; and yet what difficulties beset her. The firm with which she generally dealt in London had just told her that they would only deliver one of two new frocks she had ordered unless she let them have a hundred pounds on account, and she did not know where to find a hundred pounds. Yet she could not do without the two frocks. Her thoughts turned from John to Christian and from Christian to Oliver without much comfort. John and Christian were impossible and she did not want to alarm Oliver. What was she to do?

"I know," she said suddenly. "We'll run up to London next week and you can get something from my woman Suzanne. She always has charming little frocks ready for *débutantes* and she is not expensive."

"What do you call not expensive?"

"Oh! I don't know. We shall see when we get there. You mustn't be a little miser, Christian. Besides we are told that the labourer is worth his hire and I take it to mean amongst other things that if you want something decent to wear you must pay for it."

"Will John be willing to run up to London next week? He is always so busy with meetings."

"What do we want John for?"

"Can we go by ourselves to a London hotel?"

"My dear girl, where *have* you lived? Of course I know where you've lived, but even at Chiswick I should have thought you might have been a little more awake. We'll go up on Monday and come back on Friday or Saturday and I'll get in two or three dancing-lessons."

"Dancing lessons!" exclaimed Christian. "I learned dancing when I was ten."

"Yes and I daresay it's time you brushed yourself up."

"But can I dance when I'm in mourning?"

"Of course you can if you feel like it. That mid-Victorian hypocrisy is out of date, darling. We are more honest with ourselves than our parents and grand-parents were. By the way, I shall have to have a toothache."

"A toothache!"

"I must give John some reason for going up and the dentist is always a good one. I do go to a London dentist now and then."

"But must you go next week?"

"I must if I can get it in," said Clare. "You see I shall have to charge John for his fees and I should hate to do that unless I had paid them."

VII

OLIVER was waiting in the lounge of the Ritz for Clare and Christian. They were late for dinner and would be late for the play to which he was taking them. He had come up to London the same day as they did and Clare had been late for every appointment they had made. This had troubled Christian because she saw that in spite of outward urbanity Oliver did not like it ; but she was helpless in Clare's hands.

Oliver was not feeling as impatient as usual to-night because he was amusing himself by watching a pronounced flirtation between a very young girl and a boy of about twenty who sat so near him that he could hear all the girl said. The boy took care to lower his voice, but she did nothing of the kind. Looked at dispassionately she was not a pretty girl, but Oliver perceived that she was the kind for whom men pass pretty girls by. At present her figure was lanky and was not improved by her school-girlish white frock with its cautious scoop and traces of the laundry. But her figure had possibilities and in spite of her frock she managed to look attractive. She had long dark eyes alight with mischief and a thick mop of wavy black hair in which she had placed a scarlet flower that glowed in it like a jewel. Anyone could see that

the boy was badly hit, but the girl's fresh young voice and roving eyes bespoke a sound heart and a quiet mind.

" I wish he could see me here," she had just said with wicked glee.

" I don't," said the boy raising his voice in his horror so that his words reached Oliver. " It would be dashed uncomfortable."

" I shouldn't care a bit," said the girl. " If he was disagreeable I should put out my tongue at him."

" But I couldn't do that," said the boy.

" You could put all the blame on me."

" Oh ! Of course I could do that ! "

" Don't be priggish, Wiggles. You'll spoil our night out."

" I wish you'd call things by their right names. Whatever happens you've got to catch the 11 o'clock train."

" If the play is finished," said the girl firmly.

" Whether it is finished or not," beseeched the boy. " As it is I'm afraid you may have trouble. What did you put in your wire this morning ? "

" Coming by night train. There was nothing else to put."

" You didn't pretend you had missed the mid-day train."

" How could I when I never went near the station ? "

The boy's eyes became, if possible, more admiring than they had been before.

" You're as straight as a man," he said.

" If I couldn't think of anything better than that to say I wouldn't speak at all," said the girl sticking two slim silk legs in front of her and fixing her eyes on

two smart shoes. "I probably know a great many more women . . . . ."

"But you've been shut up in your school most of your life."

"Well, what do you suppose I met in school? Penguins?"

"Children. Flappers."

"If you dare to use that word flapper in my hearing, Wiggles, we part brass rags. After all what are you?"

"I don't see what that has to do with it. Anyhow I'm not a flapper and if you mean that I'm not as old as that confounded riding-master."

"He did ride well," said the girl, her eyes assuming a rapt expression obviously put on to annoy her companion. "He said he had never taught anyone with such light hands as mine."

"I wonder you wanted teaching at all. I should have thought you would have been on a pony by the time you were three."

"I was."

"Then why did you take lessons?"

The girl actually did now what she had threatened to do to someone else before and perhaps the boy's tone which had been slightly dictatorial deserved rebuke. At any rate she put out the tip of her pink tongue to him instead of answering his question and then turned her laughing eyes on Oliver in search of sympathy; which he felt ready to give. He liked the girl, though he felt rather sorry for the boy; and he wondered how they came to be here together without a chaperone. But he realised that he had been a long while out of England and that the social law had probably undergone changes. Revolt was in the air and revolt is always troublesome

to long established rule. However Oliver was not in the least interested in feminine politics. It was nothing new for a daughter of Eve to do that which she should not do and as long as she did not belong to him the more of the devil there was in a woman the better he liked her. His eyes were laughing too as they met the girl's glance and while he lit a cigarette he looked at her over its little puff of smoke. But the next moment she disconcerted him so much that he wished she was a thousand miles away and that he had never looked at her at all for with a quick impulsive movement she got up from her chair and sat down close beside him on the sofa. The boy half rose from his seat, looked at Oliver in painful embarrassment and seemed uncertain what to do next. The girl snuggled closer to Oliver and said in a low confidential voice :

" I think you might have been to see me."

Oliver said " Oh damn ! " to himself and made polite noises in his throat at the girl. The boy rose to his feet, blushing to the roots of his hair, inarticulate and miserable.

" I say——" he began.

" Sit down, Wiggles," the girl commanded. " What I do is no concern of yours at all. You're not my brother, are you ? "

" I'm glad to say I'm not. But I brought you here."

" You didn't. I brought you. I insisted on your coming and on your taking me to the theatre. You know you didn't want to."

" I wanted to right enough, but I thought perhaps—and really I didn't expect—I don't know what to say, sir—you see we've only just left school—I mean she has—I mean—— "

" Sit down and be quiet, Wiggles. You're not on in this scene. I've just recognised a long lost friend from his photograph and he doesn't remember me and it's very painful. To think that I've often kissed him and now he doesn't know me. Perhaps he doesn't want to."

By this time the girl was so close to Oliver that her cheek touched his shoulder and he had edged away so much that he could edge away no further. She had him pinned in the corner of the sofa and her manner became more and more affectionate. Luckily at this hour there was hardly anyone else in the lounge.

" You are Oliver Hawke," she said. " I haven't make a mistake I hope. That would be awkward. I should blush as pink as Wiggles is blushing now."

" I'm Oliver Hawke."

" I didn't know you at first. Your eyes gave you away when they twinkled at me just now, I like your looks, Oliver. You're not exactly handsome, but you'll do. Fancy your not remembering me. I suppose I have altered a bit since we met every day."

" As far as I know I've never seen you before," said Oliver and looked helplessly at the boy. The girl's eyes were dancing with wickedness and her voice cooed in his ear.

" Aren't you going to give me a kiss, Olly ? " she murmured and she just brushed his cheek with her lips, but withdrew her head hastily because Clare in a gorgeous evening cloak came up to them followed by Christian.

" Hullo, Jane ! " Clare said to the girl. " Where do you spring from ? "

" You little devil," said Oliver in an undertone as soon as he got the chance, which came when they were in the dining-room, " What do you think you're doing here ? Who gave you leave to be running about London without anyone to look after you ? "

" Wiggles is looking after me and he's as fussy as an old woman. Didn't you hear him ? "

" He looks a decent boy. Who is he ? "

" His name is Ambrose March and he has just left Sandhurst. He wants to ask you if we may be engaged."

" He'd better not."

" That's what I told him. I'm the person to ask and I'm in no hurry. He isn't the only pebble on the beach. I'm going to look round a bit and I shan't need him so much now that you're about. I hope Clare hasn't swallowed you whole. If she has there'll be trouble. I want you myself till you get married and I'll choose your wife. I know exactly the kind of sister-in-law I should like."

" You had better sit at our table," Oliver said to Ambrose March, " and after the theatre will you take my sister to the Stafford Hotel where Mrs. Loudon is staying. I'll 'phone for a room directly. Where did you leave your luggage, Jane ? "

" I sent most of it on from Folkestone yesterday. I only have a suit-case with me and that's in the cloak-room at Charing Cross. We were going to pick it up on our way to Paddington. How long are you staying on in London ? I haven't half done my Christmas shopping and I've spent all my money. Can't I stay with you at your hotel, Oliver ? Are you and Clare at the same one ? "

"No. We are not," said Oliver. "I'm at my club."

"Do you like a club better than a hotel?"

"Yes. I do."

"Then you'd better join a cock and hen one as quick as you can. I shall want to come up to London pretty often. That's a new pendant, isn't it, Clare? Did Major Loudon give it you? By the way, I met Owen Conway's sister this summer at Folkestone. She asked after you. Oliver, now that I'm coming out I shall want piles of new clothes like Clare's. I might begin ordering some to-morrow. Are you going to give me an allowance or pay my bills? I wonder which pans out best. What do you think, my gracious silence?"

Christian to whom Jane addressed this question had scarcely spoken yet. The girl, fascinated and astonished her. She was only a year younger than Christian, she had left school yesterday and yet she chattered like a magpie and had the assurance of a terrier.

"We had to do Coriolanus last term," the girl went on, "I don't suppose any of you know it. He calls his wife his gracious silence because she never opens her mouth. At least she says about three words and then closes down while he and his mother gas by the hour. The commentators consider her one of the most beautiful characters in Shakespeare. It just shows what men really admire, doesn't it? I expect Oliver and Wiggles both wish I was like you."

"I do," said Oliver looking at Christian. He had seen a good deal of her this week and had found himself more than once watching for the faint apple blossom flush that came if he spoke to her suddenly and even sometimes if she looked up and met his eyes. She was

a girl of delicate charm and shy, but he judged that she was not a fool ; and it was difficult to believe that there was any tie of blood between her and her step-sister. But when he said aloud that he wished his own sister was like her Jane grinned at him and winked.

" I'm going to have a lively inmate at Maniton," he said when she had left for the theatre accompanied by the boy.

" I like her," said Christian and spoke with decision.

VIII

CHRISTIAN dressed herself with great care. It was her last day in London, she had done her morning's shopping by herself and now she was getting ready for lunch at a small French restaurant in Soho that Clare had said yesterday she wanted to try as a change from the Ritz and the Carlton. Clare had taken Jane to Dover Street to find her some clothes and they were all to meet for lunch at one and then go to the Hippodrome. Oliver had told them the night before that he would engage a table for lunch and that they were not to be late. By this time Christian knew that he was a punctual man and quick tempered, and that Clare's unpunctuality had strained his temper over and over again. Clare never found out that he was angry, but Christian did at once and unless she was careful caught herself looking at him anxiously. Twice yesterday she had not been careful enough and then their eyes had met and his anger had departed; but only because she had amused him. He treated her as if she was the same age as Jane who was still at school and he called her Christian while she still called him Mr. Hawke. Of course there was a great difference of age between them; but he did not realise as completely as he should have done that she had left school and was a full year older than Jane. Yesterday after having had tea at Fuller's he had given Clare a box of

marrons glacés and the two girls boxes of mixed sweets exactly alike. Looking back at all that had happened since they first met Christian had to recognise that for a long while he had not noticed her at all and that when his sister came he behaved as if Christian and she were twins and compared with Clare and himself, children. This was exasperating and Christian wondered what she could do to stop it. Any sensible person knows that the difference between seventeen and eighteen may be as immeasurable as the difference between an earthquake and a threepenny bit and that your age is more a matter of experience and temperament than of actual years. Christian looked at herself in the mirror with greater care than she had ever done in her life before and hoped her new hat gave her dignity. She had on a new coat and skirt too and they were not of plain useful black serge as they should have been ; but of grey corduroy velvet cut in a mode so new that Christian felt half afraid of it, till she put it on. Then she discovered that she was looking as she had never looked before, but still rather young. She trusted to her hat to rectify this, but was not sure that it did. Evidently then she must trust to herself and show Oliver by her mien and conversation that she was a great deal older than Jane. As a rule she hardly exchanged a word with him because Clare and Jane were both talkative ; but to-day she fully expected to have him to herself for ten minutes or so. She meant to get to the restaurant exactly at one and Clare would consider herself punctual if she was only ten minutes late.

He was there at the door when she arrived in her taxi and he looked pleased to see her. She had not

kept him waiting a moment, he said, but the others had not come yet. Would she like to go straight in and begin lunch or should they walk up and down for ten minutes ? There was no lounge at a restaurant of this kind, he explained, so they must do one or the other ; and when he had said this, he complimented her on being punctual which made her flush with pleasure and at the same time feel a little annoyed. His tone was still what it might have been to Jane who was only seventeen and at school.

" How charming you look to-day," he went on, " I suppose these are the things Clare chose for you ? "

Again Christian felt both vexed and gratified, which was confusing. She was glad that her appearance charmed him, but not that he told her so downrightly ; and she wished that she had chosen her own clothes and could tell him Clare had nothing to do with them. However that was impossible. She still trusted herself so little that she had allowed herself to be dressed like a doll by her step-sister and the forewoman at Dover Street and when she thought of the evening frocks they had chosen for her and the bills she would shortly have to pay she felt uneasy.

" Clare is very clever about clothes," she said. " She has ideas and knows what suits people and she is good-natured. She took a great deal of trouble about mine. But I think John will be horrified when he finds what we have both been spending."

" Don't you both have allowances ? " said Oliver.

" I don't know about Clare," said Christian who knew that Clare complained bitterly of her husband's miserly ways, hardly ever had a penny and yet by hook or by crook spent money like water. " I never had

an allowance while my mother was alive. She bought me what she could afford. Now all her income belongs to me and it seemed a great deal until I came to London this week. I believe I must have spent nearly a hundred pounds and John said I ought to make a hundred pounds last a year. I thought it would easily."

" I was not going to give Jane as much as a hundred," said Oliver. " I thought fifty or sixty would do."

" But you have let her go with Clare to Dover Street this morning. They were to get several things, I know."

" Jane asked me if she might have the same as you and I thought that as she was about your age—— "

" But she isn't," said Christian with emphasis. " She is at least a year younger."

" Is she ? " said Oliver raking the street for signs of Clare and hardly attending to what Christian said. " We'll go and have lunch now I think. They won't keep our table if we wait much longer and then we should starve. Come along."

He was not out of temper as he had been on other occasions when Clare was late. He was rather eager and decided, like a man who sees a chance and means to take it ; and when they were seated together at a corner table in a room on the first floor he looked at her, she thought as if she was a new discovery and a pleasant one. She wished she knew what interested him so that she could talk of it in a grown-up way, but at first he was occupied with the Menu, then with the waiter who took his order and then with the Wine List. When Clare was not there to shilly shally over everything he was quick and decided in his choice and he did

not seem to think it necessary to consult Christian much ; but he remembered that she liked oysters and chicken and an ice with hot chocolate sauce poured over it. The room in which they sat was crowded with other people having lunch and there was a good deal of noise and clatter going on. But in their tucked away corner Oliver and Christian were better able to talk to each other than they had ever been before because Clare was not there to monopolise the man and treat the girl as if she was a negligible child.

" I hope you will come more to Maniton than you have done now that Jane is there," Oliver said. " It will be a bit dull for her with no one but me as a companion."

That apple blossom colour came like light in Christian's face as she answered him and her eyes danced with irony. She was laughing at him, the child ; and she hardly was a child to-day. Her new clothes added to her years as well as to her beauty. Before long she would be an exquisite woman, small boned, delicately made, as warmly pale as an Italian, with eyes that at times were quiet and serious and at times had depths in them that presumably no man had stirred yet. She had a neat head and Oliver set stress on neatness in women. No Blowsabel had ever pleased his fastidious taste ; and no athletic hoyden ever would. Jane was a good sort evidently, but from his point of view all a young woman should not be. She shouted when she wanted to shout, her attitudes were reminiscent of the hockey field, and her roving gaze was as frank as a boy's. He hoped she would make friends with Christian and allow herself to be toned down and it was with this idea in his mind that he brought out his remark

about Maniton. He did not understand why Christian laughed at it ; while Christian was amused, as women of all ages perennially must be, by the inability of that superior creature the male, to see what lies under his eyes. Oliver apparently did not know that Clare wanted no woman but herself to be in and out of Maniton on intimate terms ; nor did he guess yet that his sister Jane would never allow herself to be boxed up and dull. She had other ideas and had confided some of them to Christian already ; and one thing she had made plain was that no love ever had been or ever would be lost between herself and Clare. Oliver, therefore, was not going home to the dead calm he expected, and the girl he treated like a child knew it, while he, a man of experience and years, did not. However he had a little surprise that very morning when Clare and Jane arrived with Ambrose March. The boy was blushing and embarrassed, but the two ladies were completely at their ease.

" I wanted you to meet again," Jane said to her brother. " To-day seemed to be the only chance as we are all going home to-morrow. Sit here, Ambrose, between Oliver and me. Are we late ? I thought we should be, but when you see the frocks I've chosen for the Christmas parties you'll whistle. They are rather expensive, but as you said you couldn't bring me up for the season I thought I'd come out at Granfield this Christmas and you can't come out in rags. Christian and I together are going to make a sensation. Of course Christian is much prettier than I am really only she doesn't know it ; but she will when I've taken her in hand. I suppose you've not noticed how lovely Christian is, Oliver ; I expect a man's taste gets coars-

ened in the East with all those nautch girls about and curry to eat. You get used to—— "

" Will you attend to your lunch and be quiet," said Oliver in her ear. " If you don't take care you'll find yourself back at school before you're much older."

" I was only going to say that curry is hot in the mouth like ginger and spoils you for anything delicate," said Jane fixing her eyes on Clare and speaking in a voice of injured innocence. " But I advise you not to threaten me with school again, Oliver. If you do you'll wake up some morning and find I've run away with Ambrose."

" Nothing of the kind, sir," stammered the boy. " I should never dream—much as I should like it."

" Of course you'd like it," pursued Jane, " but it won't happen unless Oliver irritates me. You know, Oliver, you're not up to date. You've been away from England for fifteen years and you've no idea of what we women have done for ourselves in that time."

Jane who had just gobbled her chicken and was waiting for her ice looked at her audience and grinned. She did not put her arms akimbo, but she suggested a defiant and declamatory attitude by her tone, and Clare who had been listening rather sulkily now spoke to her.

" You're afraid," she said leaning forward a little, " all that chatter conceals the bedrock truth that you are afraid. I knew you would be when it came to the point."

" I'm not. I'm not," asserted Jane angrily. " But I don't want to give him a shock. How am I to know whether his heart is sound after so many years in a hot climate ? Is your heart sound, Oliver ? I mean really,

not metaphorically ? Snakes alive ! I've lost my gold purse and it had the key of my trunk in it. Perhaps I dropped it downstairs. Do go and ask, Ambrose. I shall be in a fizzle till I find it. If you bring it back I'll be engaged to you—just for the holidays."

Christian hardly knew whether to laugh or not when Jane held up the purse to the general view directly the enamoured youth had departed. The girl's eyes were so full of mischief and her manner so fearless and beguiling, that even while you knew she deserved rebuke she disarmed you. That at any rate seemed to be the net result of the impression she made on her brother for Oliver tried to look at her severely but broke down when she winked at him.

" You won't mind, old thing, will you ? " she said edging a little nearer. " Don't look so anxious. I promise not to fall round your neck in public again. At least I won't unless you try to come the stern elder brother over me. You look that part very well, but it's no use trying to be stern to me. You'd only rouse me and I'm a terror when I'm roused. I expect we're a good deal alike really and after all Maniton is more my home than yours because the definition of a home in the Oxford dictionary is the fixed residence of a family. I've resided there all my life except when I was at school. I pin my faith on the Oxford dictionary, so before I invited Ambrose to come down with us to-morrow for Christmas—— "

" You've invited him for Christmas ? " interrupted Oliver.

" Yes," said Jane sweetly. " For a fortnight. I did it partly for your sake. He'll look after me at dances and set you free."

Her eyes strayed to Clare and then twinkled at her brother.

" It really is a good idea," said Clare. " The six of us can go to things together and he seems a charming boy."

" He isn't bad," said Jane, " but he is full of old world ideas. He says he can't come unless you invite him, Oliver, and he calls you the master of the house."

" What would you call me ? "

" Oh, I never use those Victorian phrases ; but you will invite him, won't you ? It will make him more comfortable."

Christian laughed outright then and her laughter drew Oliver's glance to her again. It was as young as spring, and merry and kind. He liked it and he began to think that day that he was going to like her.

" What would you do if you were me ? " he said to her and did not observe that Clare was watching him.

" I should let Jane twist me round my little finger," she suggested.

" He will," said Jane.

IX

OLIVER soon found that Jane was much more at home at Maniton than he was himself yet. She knew the family history of everyone who lived on the estate, the inside of their cottages, their likes and dislikes and their political opinions. She had a soft heart for their troubles and a retentive memory for their needs and in some cases she thought he had been hard in his dismissals. One man had grown old in the service of Maniton and another had six children all under ten; and she argued, woman like, that here were reasons for overlooking their faults. Oliver, man-like, did not agree with her.

"One was a slacker and the other was a thief," he pointed out. "That Smith must have swindled Raymond for years."

"Raymond was very kind-hearted," said Jane. "He knew that six little Smiths had to be fed; at least there were only four in his time. The twins can't be more than six months old. Were they nice twins?"

"I shouldn't think so since Smith fathered them," said Oliver getting up and going to the sideboard for a second helping of ham. He, Jane and Ambrose March were at breakfast together and it was Christmas Day.

The heavens had obliged Jane by powdering the earth with snow during the night and it was still lying on the broad branches of the various conifers in sight beyond the lawn. On Jane's bird table fixed in front of the dining-room window a blackbird and a cock robin were now in possession, having driven off a wren and several chaffinches ; and on half a cocoa nut, swinging a little above the table a procession of tits ate their Christmas breakfast in attitudes that reminded Jane of acrobats on a trapeze. The day before, assisted by Ambrose March and Christian she had decorated the house with holly and mistletoe, and although Oliver had said he was too busy to help them there had been moments when he had come on the scene and given a hand. That night Highwood was coming to dine at Maniton, and next day there was to be a small, informal gathering and a charade arranged by Clare at Highwood. Clare had wanted a larger affair, but, as she had told Oliver, John had been tiresome about it. He was an easily managed man in some ways ; but he was determined not to let his wife ruin him financially. This inconsiderate determination made him extremely tiresome at times ; and suspicious too. He had only half believed in the toothache that drove Clare to London ; and when she came back with her trunk full of new clothes and gewgaws she had not been able to show them to him *en masse* because he would have asked her who the devil was going to pay for them. She could not have answered him. Dover Street had let her have things since she had brought two new customers who were likely to pay promptly ; but she owed the firm a great deal. At least it was not really a great deal ; but it

was more than she could find unless her husband or some other man stood by her; and just at present Oliver was the only man in the foreground. She wanted to tighten her hold on Oliver for various reasons, partly on account of her money difficulties, and partly because she was as much in love with him as a woman of her nature can be in love with anyone; and she was afraid of Jane.

"I think my position here should be defined," Jane said on Christmas morning when she had poured out two cups of coffee for her brother and Ambrose and was starting her own breakfast with bacon and eggs. "I suppose I may consider myself mistress of the house until you marry?"

"You may order the dinner if that's what you mean," said Oliver. "At least you may as long as you give me satisfaction and don't worry Mrs. Stoughton too much."

"I suppose that's all you'll allow your wife to do?"

Oliver hardly answered and Jane's attention was diverted by a wood pigeon who drove several small birds from their breakfast and ate greedily itself. She prepared a large plateful of crumbs and scraps of fat and opening the window frightened off the pigeon before she put out the fresh supply of food. The cold keen winter air drove through the room when she did this and Oliver shivered.

"I expect you feel the cold after being so long in the East, sir," said Ambrose who had hardly spoken since he had wished Jane a merry Christmas.

"That puts the lid on," said Jane coming back to the breakfast table. "You've done for yourself now, Ambrose. A man who always says the obvious thing

would drive me crazy. My answer is in the negative."

"Get on with your breakfast, Jane," said her brother. "The car will be at the door in half an hour."

"We can keep it waiting," she said sweetly; and she did. So they went into church just after the people from Highwood and could not wish them a merry Christmas till the service was over and they met in the churchyard. They stood together for a few minutes in a little group while the rest of the small congregation, chiefly farmers and cottagers, filed out. Most of them were Oliver's tenants or his workpeople and they all knew Jane and seemed pleased to see her.

"I'm very much liked," she said to her brother as they drove home and her impish eyes were twinkling with mischief and amusement. "If ever you get into difficulties, Oliver, you've only to come to me, and I'll put things right for you. I daresay you'll be liked in time if you take my advice. Ambrose, I wish you'd transfer your affections to Christian. She is ever so much nicer than me and a thousand times prettier. She is as lovely as a Christmas rose that hasn't been touched by weather. Clare looks like a painted doll beside her. Not that Clare does paint. She touches up her lips and her eyes, but her cheeks are naturally crimson. How coarse she'll be in a year or two. Even now Christian snuffs her out as a water colour would snuff out an oleograph. I hope you see it, Ambrose. If we don't see eye to eye about really important things like that we can't go on being friends; and that would be a loss to you."

"I like one thing about Christian," said Oliver. "She isn't a chatterbox. As you admire her so much,

Jane, why don't you try to imitate her? A little silence is an excellent thing at times."

"Speak when you're spoken to,
Do as you're bid,"

quoted Jane putting her hand through her brother's arm and allowing her head to rest affectionately close to his shoulder. "That's the whole duty of women, isn't it? What bad luck for you to have me for a sister. Never mind! I mean to marry young—No—not you, Ambrose. You needn't prick up your ears and look pleased. I know I said I'd be engaged, but that was before I'd met Oliver. I've decided now that I will marry someone rather like him."

"Poor devil!" murmured Oliver. "Take your head off my shoulder, Jane. You'll ruffle your hair."

"I've no hair to ruffle. I mean it's all hidden under my fur cap. By the way, I wonder who gave Clare her ermine. I bet you anything it wasn't her husband. Don't look down your nose in that way, Oliver. Everyone in the neighbourhood except Major Loudon knows that Clare's men friends settle her bills for her. Mabel Bluett told me about it last time I was home. Captain Conway had plenty of money——"

"That's enough, Jane," said Oliver and Jane subsided for the time being, but revived when she got in and found a Christmas post and Christmas presents awaiting her.

Maniton was a pleasant roomy house re-built about seventy years ago by Oliver's grand parents. The furniture was mostly of that period and considered dull by Jane. But the chief rooms were large and had wide windows looking at the gardens and the creek. Small craft making their way out to sea or up the river

passed lazily to and fro, and this morning there was bright sunshine on the water and on the brown sails of a fishing smack that hardly stirred. Jane announced at lunch that she meant to row across the creek to Highwood after lunch, and though Oliver said he shivered at the thought of it, he as well as Ambrose went with her. They found Clare alone in the drawing-room. She said that her husband was out and glancing at Jane, she added that Christian was upstairs.

"My sister has a room to herself at the top of the house and lives there mostly," she went on addressing herself to Ambrose. "It has a beautiful view of the creek. Jane, why don't you take Mr. March to see it?"

"I'm afraid the stairs would be too much for his heart. Oliver, you come and rout Christian out," said Jane, and while the blushing youth was protesting that he had no heart and did not mind stairs the brother and sister drifted out of the room together.

"Have you ever seen Christian's room?" asked Jane as they were on the way up.

"No," said Oliver.

"It's like her. Rooms are like people somehow. We shall have to change things at Maniton before long. The drawing-room gets on my nerves. I don't mind the library and the dining-room. You're not listening Oliver. What are you thinking of?"

Oliver did not tell her but followed his sister upstairs to the second floor where Christian had her eyrie. He wanted to see it and to see her in it and to watch her eyes when he appeared there unexpectedly. She had great self control, but she could not control a light that came into her eyes at times or that delicate glow

of colour in her pale cheeks. She was always quiet in his presence, but lately she had been a good deal at Maniton with Jane and he had heard the two girls laughing and chattering in his house like two children at play. When they were doing the Christmas decorations yesterday he had gone in once or twice to help them and Jane had insisted on being kissed under the mistletoe and on Christian being kissed too. She had egged him on to catch Christian unawares and he had done it successfully ; too successfully for his peace of mind or hers. The moment glowed in his memory like a half told tale of which he desired to know the end. The sudden colour and confusion in her face had only been the complement of the surprise he felt himself when he took her in his arms. She was a child just waking to womanhood and his kiss had startled and troubled her. Would she remember it when he went in to her to-day ? At church this morning her eyes had not met his once and after church they had not exchanged a word. Now she should speak to him.

" I've brought Oliver up here to see the view," announced Jane. " Where are your presents, Christian ? In your bedroom ? Can I go and see them ? I want to powder my nose and I daren't do it before Oliver. He hates scent too, so put on plenty to-night because you're to sit next to him at dinner and I want him to get used to it. Cheerio ! "

" So this is your room," said Oliver turning from the window with its wide view of the creek and the sea outside the creek. " This is Christian's home at present. Let me look at it."

He was standing so close to her that she moved away a little and in her effort to appear unembarrassed she

began to act as guide to her room showing him books and pictures that had been her mother's treasures and were now her own. He answered her absently when an answer was necessary, but she knew that his attention was given to her although it was not fixed on what she said. Her own thoughts had been in a flurry ever since yesterday; for she believed him to be deeply engaged with Clare. Yet when he caught her under the mistletoe and smiled at her confusion his manner had been lingering and tender; as if he would have liked to keep her there and reassure her. But she must remember that he belonged to Clare.

"I'll fetch Jane," she said when Jane had been gone two or three minutes. "Clare will expect us to go down."

"No," said Oliver, "I like being up here with you. Why have I never seen it before? How secretive you are, Christian! and how little I know about you, though I've seen you most days for nearly six months. I wonder what surprises there are in you. Of course you are not grown up yet."

"I hate you to say that," cried Christian. "You say it to tease, I know. You're laughing at me. I am grown-up. I am."

"I almost believe you are," thought Oliver. "I believe you grew up yesterday!"

X

"OF COURSE this is your house and you must have your own way in it," said Jane.

"That's very kind of you," said Oliver.

"Until your wife comes."

"More than ever then. I don't expect a wife to give as much trouble as a sister. You more or less choose a wife—— "

"Nothing of the kind. How little you know! But I wish you'd attend to what I say. That Christmas number can wait till you're in your den 'at work.' "

Jane made a snatch at the paper in her brother's hand and got it. He submitted lazily and looked at her with that twinkle about his mouth and at the corner of his eyes that salted his words and often acted as a humourous gloss on their apparently ungracious meaning. He usually twinkled at Jane and though it seemed to the serious Ambrose that they were always quarrelling he realised with considerable puzzlement that they were the best of friends.

"This Christmas dinner is going to be a failure," pursued Jane.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Oliver. "I thought that as Mrs. Stoughton was responsible for it—it would be a success . . . She assured me that all you had done was to stir the pudding the day after you returned from school and I told her that was exactly all I wished or expected you to do. We must remember that Miss

Jane is quite a child, I told her. Jane, if you dare to ruffle my hair I'll smack you. I swear I will—and then you'll cry and your eyes will be red—besides I hear a car—they're arriving—sit down and behave—if you can—you look quite nice. I suppose Clare dresses you. I must speak to her about your hair. I think I shall let it grow again."

Jane made a dash at her brother's sleek head but did not reach it and as he caught her wrists in his, subsided on his knee.

" They won't be here yet," she said. " You know what Clare is. Listen and I'll tell you where you've jolly well made a mistake about this dinner. We ought to have had more people. It will be too intimate and no one will enjoy it except you and Clare. Christian will have a rotten time."

" I hope not," said Oliver.

" Of course she will. You won't notice her. Clare will see to that, and the old Major isn't exciting. I shall do my best as hostess—wait a minute—let me think—Ambrose—would you like six dances with me at the County Ball on New Year's Eve ? "

" Rather," said Ambrose.

" I know you'd like every dance, but it would never do. You've no idea how censorious people are in the country. I'm most careful, but I'll give you six dances if, to please me, you'll make love to Clare violently all through dinner."

The boy blushed to the roots of his hair and looked thoroughly uncomfortable.

" I shouldn't know how to begin," he mumbled.

" Yes, you would. Think she's me."

" I couldn't do that."

"I never had a sister," began Oliver, pushing Jane from his knee because this time he really did hear the sounds of arrival in the hall. "I mean that when I was your age there wasn't a girl about, but if there had been and she had talked the nonsense you do, she'd have been packed off to bed without supper and serve her right. I can't think what poor old Raymond was doing not to bring you up better."

"I can be a perfect lady—when I choose," breathed Jane just as the door opened and Wickham showed in the party from Highwood; and after closing one eye at her brother she went forward to meet his guests with an air of dignity that she hardly dropped until half a glass of champagne had gone to her head a little and encouraged her to make love in an agreeable way to Major Loudon.

While she did this Ambrose tried to please her by talking to Mrs. Loudon, who was not to his taste and who as a rule ignored him; but this evening she met him half way and during two courses led him to believe that he was more of a blade than he knew. So he felt happy. But of the six people dining at Maniton that night Christian was the happiest because Oliver treated her as if she were grown up and as if she pleased him. He looked at her much as he had looked at her in the restaurant in Soho and he talked to her more than he talked to Clare; which was astounding and disturbing. Christian wondered whether he had quarrelled with Clare. She saw as dinner went on that her step-sister was ruffled, but Oliver did not seem to see it. When the crackers were pulled that Jane had put on the table, he chose the cap that he said would suit Christian and put it on her head so that for a breathless moment

his arms were on either side of her and his hands just touched her cloud of hair. He seemed to be crowning her. Then after dinner when the men came into the drawing-room Jane had all the lights put out for snap-dragon ; and everyone except Christian put their hands boldly into the flaming bowl and fished out dates and figs and raisins as they came. But Christian stood beside Oliver and even hid behind him for she had never played the game and felt afraid of the flames, though she liked to watch the gestures of the players, their faces and their darting hands illumined curiously so that they looked like ghosts of themselves around a cauldron of blue lights in the dark room. But Oliver turned to her suddenly.

" You're not playing," he said in a low voice. " You've not put your hand in once."

" No," said Christian under her breath and she drew away a little with him so that they could speak unheard. This was not difficult because Jane, Ambrose and Clare, were all laughing and talking loudly about their own daring and their successes.

" Why don't you ? " persisted Oliver.

" I never have. I'm afraid."

She lifted her eyes to his with an air of defiance that he accepted as if it had been a challenge.

" I'll show you how," he said, " I'll put your hand in."

" No," she said in a low voice ; but her voice quavered.

" Yes," he said and she followed him, a little afraid but more fascinated than afraid. He took hold of her wrist, plunged it into the flames and pulled it out again.

" Now try by yourself and get hold of something," he said.

Her heart thumped against her side, but though she did not understand why, she knew that she must do as he told her even if the flames burned. So she thrust her hand in again and this time brought out a raisin.

"That's right," he said in her ear, and his voice was like a caress so that the memory of it glowed within her. But when the lights were turned on again Clare came up to him with beckoning eyes and on some pretext to do with next day's charades, took him to a comfortable corner in a distant part of the room and kept him there as long as she could.

"You're not a bit nice to me to-night," she said soon. "What have I done?"

Oliver like most men hated the pathetic stop. It made him uncomfortable, especially when an attraction felt some time since had evaporated and evaporated in the heat of the lady's little tempers and exactions. To tell the truth he was tired of Clare and in no mood to fetch and carry for her. But a man has to be civil in his own house and he could only express regret at having failed to please her which he did immediately. Unfortunately his eyes, as he did so, followed Christian who, to the tune of a rag time on a gramophone, was dancing a two step with Ambrose while Jane gambolled round them as instructress.

"Poor Christian," laughed Clare. "She hasn't had a chance. It isn't fair to bring a girl up like that unless she's going to be a nun. She can't dress, she can't dance, she can't drive, she hardly opens her mouth. I'm at my wits end what to do with her. I wonder if a year of Jane's school would bring her on a bit."

Oliver's eyes still followed Christian who, though she did not know the dance she was trying showed

herself quick to learn and was light on her feet. The exercise had heightened her colour slightly and she was laughing as she danced. Every now and then the couple stopped while Ambrose wrangled with Jane. Oliver hoped it was not markedly rude to Clare, but when a chance came he took it. Christian stood alone for a moment while her two teachers danced together and as they did so her host came up to her.

"Try it with me," he said, and before the music stopped, took her twice or three times round the room. She was as light as a feather he found, had an ear and was quick to step where he led.

"We ought to practise hard this week," said Jane. "You must come to tea every day, Christian, and we'll dance after tea, only it gets dark so soon—how can you get back—you had better come and stay here till New Year's Eve. Oliver, can I ask Christian to stay here this week? You see she has had dancing lessons but she has never been to a grown-up dance and we want to teach her the new steps and it gets dark so soon and she can't row or drive herself in the dark—so unless we send her home in the car——"

"Why can't you come to Highwood every afternoon and go back in the car?" suggested Clare.

"But you know how to dance," said Jane. "You've had years and years of practice; besides Major Loudon hates gramophones and noise and dust; don't you, Major? Oliver, why don't you second my invitation?"

"Because you don't let me get in a word edgeways," said Oliver. "Do come, Christian. I'll teach you to drive if you like and we'll all teach you to dance and you shall try to teach Jane to behave. I've given that up."

" I should like to come," said Christian and looked at Major Loudon but not at Clare.

" You can come back with us to-morrow night," said Jane. " What good ideas I have ! Now you would never have thought of it, Oliver, would you ? Can you play bridge, Christian ? "

" Yes," said Christian unexpectedly.

" Then we'll play every night. I want to learn, and it's a good chance when Ambrose is here because he daren't lose his temper with me, and Oliver isn't as bad tempered at cards as he is about everything else. He likes a game of bridge after dinner. Men do, you know, when they come to his age. You won't mind a Darby and Joan week, will you, Clare ? It must be ages since you had one."

XI

MAJOR LOUDON had been a subaltern and then a captain at the time of the Boer war and had come out of it with credit. Men liked and trusted him. He was not brilliant but he was solid and sensible. At least he was sensible where men were concerned and in his conduct of business and practical affairs. When it came to women it was another story. They were difficult and enigmatic creatures with standards of their own and ways he could not follow. Is it not amazing that a hard bitten soldier of thirty-two should marry a girl of twenty and be unable to control her? He has knocked about the world and she has lived in seclusion, like a nun in a convent. At least he thinks so. Years, experience, law, society, the purse strings and the elemental differences of sex are all on his side; and yet he can do nothing with her. At every step she eludes and fools him. He must be glad if she does not ruin him; the soft weak unmanageable creature. She will if she can.

Major Loudon had been thinking a good deal about his wife and her doings lately and the more he thought the less he liked the look of things. He would not know how much she had run into debt until the New Year's bills came in and she would keep some of those from him if she could. He had reduced her dress allowance long ago because over and over again she

had squandered it and left him to pay her bills. He had been obliged to take the housekeeping into his own hands and did it for less than half what she had said was necessary; but he did not enjoy doing it. There was not much in life that he did enjoy just now except his dinner and his garden; and yet more than those the presence of Christian in his house. But he could not say much to her about his troubles. She was too young, he thought, to understand some aspects of them.

That frock Clare had worn yesterday was a new one. He felt sure of it. She must have brought it from London with her, although she had assured him that she had bought next to nothing. She had worn a new coat and skirt to church too and the ermine for which he had never paid. He was not a rich man, but he had enough to live on at Highwood with a reasonable woman. When he first married he had often reasoned with Clare, told her what their joint means were and shown her what they could afford for personal expenses. It had never done any good and he had long since given it up. Sometimes now he got so angry that he raged at her, but a man like John Loudon does not want to rage at a woman if he can help it. To do so offends his taste and his traditions. He had old-fashioned chivalrous ideas of the oak and the ivy kind and he was not coarse grained enough to manage a woman as slippery as Clare. Still there are things no self respecting husband can stand without losing his self respect and Major Loudon was getting suspicious and uneasy. He knew by this time that his wife was followed by admirers as inevitably as a comet is followed by its tail, but hitherto he had not taken seri-

ously the youths she attracted. Oliver was a different matter. Major Loudon hoped it was not Oliver who had paid for the ermine and possibly for other things. That new pendant for instance that she had worn yesterday for the first time and said was a Christmas present from her Aunt Bethia! It was not Aunt Bethia's custom to send Clare expensive presents; and the pendant must have cost a good deal; perhaps more than the ermine. Clare was such a curious mixture of guile, inconsequence and impolitic candour. She let the whole neighbourhood see that she was head over ears in love with Oliver and possibly everyone except her husband knew that he had given her the ermine; and perhaps the pendant. Major Loudon brooded over these things as he sat over his fire on the last day of the old year and wondered what he could do.

Christian had been at Maniton all the week and he had missed her. She had gone there on Boxing Night after the evening at Highwood when there had been a small informal party and a charade. Clare was clever about charades and this one had been a success, but it had not pleased Major Loudon because some scenes in it had advertised what would have been better hidden. Clare had made love to Oliver with embarrassing publicity. In one scene when she had sat on his knee and put her arms round his neck . . . really . . . if the Major had followed his feeling she would have jumped up and pulled her away. He did not like it at all and he doubted whether Oliver liked it either. His acting had been wooden and irresponsive except in one scene when he had come on as Omar Khayam and Christian had been Thou. There had been a squabble over that scene because Clare had cast

herself from Thou and Jane had told her she snatched at the best parts for herself; which was true. Jane, that immature imp stood up to Clare with greater courage and success than the soldier of forty did; and she got her way. Christian had looked exquisite in her Eastern robes, her hair covered with a jewelled net, and her slim body swathed in glittering stuffs that accentuated her moonlight beauty. She had come in shyly and slowly, carrying the loaf of bread to her lover and he had not been wooden as he went forward to meet her. Their scene had been one of the triumphs of the evening and the other had been scored by Jane and Ambrose as Alpine climbers on peaks made by step ladders and high chairs draped with rugs. They had clashed to and fro over these obstacles as agile as monkeys and as absurd and, had preserved their gravity while the lookers on roared with laughter. But Clare was not in a laughing mood when the Maniton party drove off carrying Christian with them. She would have prevented it if she could, but she had not known how.

A week of boredom and anxiety followed, during which her usual facile good humour went to pieces. She made several attempts to see Oliver, but when she went to Maniton he did not appear and when she asked him to Highwood he did not come. One afternoon when the Major was driving her back from Granfield they met Oliver and Christian in the Maniton dog-cart and Christian had the reins in her hands. Oliver raised his hat as they passed, but his attention was given to the girl beside him. Clare had seen her offer him the reins as they were about to pass each other and had seen him refuse them although the dog-cart had a deep

ditch on its off side and it was a narrow road. She had seen Christian's quick colour come and go again as she obeyed his gesture and took the cart carefully past the pony trap.

The morning after this encounter, Oliver received a note from Clare sent by hand. It was one of those notes some women send to men in total misapprehension of their effect on the recipient. It pulled out the pathetic stop, was both slangy and appealing, made claims of friendship and asked him to tea that afternoon because she really needed his advice. "What she really needs is my cheque-book!" thought Oliver coarsely and impatiently; and though he went, he went unwillingly. He was not surprised to find her alone, seductively arrayed in a warm scented room that stole upon the senses of a man coming in from hard exercise on a chill winter afternoon.

"I haven't seen you for nearly a week," she said, "I've been so miserable and lonely."

"I'm sorry," said Oliver not looking or feeling in the least sorry but only awkward.

"You've changed so lately. Why is it?"

"Have I changed?"

"You've turned cold and unfriendly. You avoid me. What have I done?"

Oliver wished himself out of the room, but wishes are not always enough to move a man; so he mumbled something inadequate about it being a busy time of year and took a chair on the opposite side of the fire-place instead of one nearer to her which had an air of invitation. Lamps were lighted and tea had been brought in, but Clare did not occupy herself with it just yet.

"You said you wanted to talk to me about some-

thing," he reminded her and made no attempt to answer her charge of unfriendliness ; a charge that a cleverer woman would never have made.

" I wanted most of all to see you," she said. " We've not had an hour together since we came back from London. You never come near me now and at Maniton there is either a crowd or you are not there . . . I suppose you are getting a little tired of it."

" Of what ? "

" Of having those three children on your hands. You are very good natured to put up with it. Jane is lively, but you might as well have two wooden images about as the March boy and Christian. At least I never get anything out of Christian. John is devoted to her because she keeps her accounts as he tells her and plays chess with him. He doesn't like her being away. There is no accounting for tastes, is there ? What is the matter with you, Oliver ? Why do you sit there and frown ? Why did you come—— ? "

Clare's voice broke slightly and she dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief. She felt that she was being badly used. Oliver was making it difficult for her to say what she had to say and he ought to have made it easy. She had thought that if only she could lure him there, she would be able to melt him as she had melted him before, and by the appeal of her beauty and the tale of her troubles get what she wanted out of him. But he was in a difficult mood ; worlds away from that memorable hour when she had gone to him with the bill for the ermine and he without a word had put it in his pocket ; or that other occasion in London when she had looked with longing eyes at a pendant in a Bond Street window and he had bought it for her.

Men ought to be glad to do little services of this kind for women, she argued. It was easier than killing dragons.

Oliver looked at his watch.

" They will be here in a few minutes," he said.

" Who will be here ? What do you mean ? "

" The three young ones. They have gone to Granfield in the car and are to call for me at half past five."

Clare got up and sat down again on the padded fender seat surrounding the fender. She sat down close to Oliver's feet and looked up at him with her brown beguiling eyes. He would have liked to move his chair further from her but refrained.

" Anyone would think by the way you talk that you and I were old," she murmured.

" They make me feel old at times," he said. " I'm getting on."

" Are you tired of me, Oliver ? "

What can a man say when he is asked such a question? In this case there had been nothing between the man and the woman but a fool flirtation and a negligible amount of money. He owed her nothing, he asked her nothing and he was tired of her ; tired of her empty mind, her exactions and her proprietary airs. But the canons of ordinary society made it impossible for him to say so in brutal English.

" Why can't we go on as we were ? " he asked.

" But that is all I ask. We were the best of friends. I would have done anything under the sun for you and you were ready to stand by me. I do need a friend just now, Oliver, more than I ever needed one before. I'm in a bad hole this time and if you don't pull me out—— "

" I hear the car," said Oliver with visible relief ; and Clare started to her feet and took her own chair again. The crimson patches on her cheeks burned against the angry pallor of her face and lips ; and when Jane dashed into the room she busied herself with the tea-cups and hardly looked at the girl or spoke to her.

" Here we are," said Jane to her brother. " Don't ever say again that I'm not punctual. You told me to be here at half past five sharp and we are nearly ten minutes before our time. Tyson let me drive the car and we came like the wind."

" I must speak to Tyson," said Oliver getting up.

" Don't do that. Speak to me. I can bear it better. Besides he didn't want me to drive. He hated my doing it ; but I wheedled him. No, thank you, Clare. We won't stay to tea to-day. We want to get back and play bridge. Did you know that Christian is a good player ? She is as good as Oliver and he fancies himself ; but then of course Christian is clever ; not a bit like you and me. However I expect I shall worry through with the brains God has given me. Good-night. We shall meet again on New Year's Eve."

XII

MAJOR LOUDON did not see what his wife was wearing at the County Ball until she joined him in the entrance hall of the Pavilion uncloaked and ready for the ball-room. Then he got a shock of a composite kind, agreeable and disagreeable. She looked her brilliant best in a shimmering garment he had never seen before and though there was less of it than in his opinion there should have been, he felt sure it had or rather would cost a pretty penny. She wore diamonds he had given her in her hair and other diamonds in the pendant round her neck; the pendant supposed to be from Aunt Bethia. She peacocked into the ball-room beside him and he saw all eyes turn her way. Men came up to her in quick succession to ask her for dances and when he himself got hold of her programme he had to be content with a single waltz some way down. The big room was fairly full already, because Clare, as usual, had been a good half hour later than her word; and as he stood near a door with other men, everyone he knew seemed either to pass by him or be like himself a looker on. Jane was in white and when the music stopped came up to him with Ambrose March and asked him to commend her.

"Don't I look well and dance well?" she said. "You would never think this was my first grown-up party would you? My programme is full already, but

I've saved a dance for you. I knew you'd like one. Clare, Christian and I are the best dressed women in the room. Have you seen Christian ? Here she comes with Oliver. You know we are both in white because we are debutantes, but we are not a bit alike. She chose satin and it suits her. She had a jewelled fillet in her hair when she came down to dinner, but Oliver made her take it off. He said it was too old for her and he was right. I don't see myself changing my decorations at any man's bidding, but Christian is a Victorian. Do you remember when Enid puts on her worst and meanest dress because Geraint tells her to ? Ambrose has never read Tennyson. He is so illiterate. But you remember, don't you, Major Loudon ? "

" I'm not sure that I do," said the Major, who knew no more about Enid than Ambrose did.

" Jane calls everyone illiterate who hasn't been stuffed with poetry at a girls' school," complained Ambrose. " But she has never read Darwin on Earth-worms and I have. Women are so one sided."

" This is our dance," said Oliver, coming up to his sister and looking her over critically. " I hope you're not coming to pieces yet. No. You look fairly tidy still."

" I never took children to a party before," he went on addressing the Major ; but he had his eye on Christian whose next partner, a boy of her own age, had just come up to her. She turned from him a moment to speak to Oliver.

" Thank you for dancing with me," she said, making him a mock curtsey ; and she went off with her boy before Oliver could answer her.

" That's one for you," said Jane. " You make

Christian and me tired when you talk as if we were kids. We can't help our age, can we ? Besides you know perfectly well that our great grandmother married when she was fifteen and had twelve children. If I'd done likewise I should be a matron in black velvet worrying about the twins. I wonder if people danced after they were married in those days. I suppose women were even more down-trodden then than they are now. You are the image of our great grandfather, Oliver. I expect his wife had a rotten time."

"Come along," said Oliver and stopped Jane's chatter for the moment by seizing her with great determination and beginning to dance.

The Major was not dancing much that night but was enjoying himself in a quiet way because he knew nearly everyone present so that he could go here and there finding friends. He would have enjoyed himself a great deal more if below the pleasant surface of his life there had not been that turmoil of anxiety about Clare. Twice he saw her dancing with Oliver and it made him angry to see it. She gave herself away in his opinion and he felt sure that others beside himself were watching her. No doubt they were smiling as they had smiled on the night of the charade when she had sat on Oliver's knee and put her arms round his neck. She could not sit on his knee in the ball-room, but she clung to him and lifted her eyes to him in a way the Major resented. It would not have mattered so much if she had not been the most conspicuous figure in the room ; but what with her shimmering dress and her blazing beauty she attracted general attention. As you looked at the crowd of dancers you were sure to find yourself following

that glancing shining creature, and on one of the two occasions when she was in Oliver's arms, her husband thought that she proclaimed her case to the world. So his anger deepened as he watched her, all the more because at the moment there was nothing that he could do ; and it happened that he was dancing with Christian when Clare was dancing with Oliver for the second time. By the subtle alchemy that fuses spirits under the same stress of trouble each understood the other's silence and discomfort when Clare whirled by them unseeing and absorbed. The Major however only thought that Christian was troubled by her step-sister's behaviour ; and he attached no other importance to her depression. He asked her what she had been doing all the week at Maniton and if she was ever coming back to Highwood.

" I'm coming back with you to-night. Didn't you know ? " said Christian.

" No," said the Major, " Clare never tells me anything. Did she get the dress she is wearing to-night in London ? "

" Yes," said Christian.

" As well as the one she wore the other night and the coat and skirt she had on on Christmas Day ? "

" We all got clothes," said Christian evasively.

" But you have paid for yours ? "

" I shall when the bill comes. I'm afraid I spent a good deal."

" I thought you didn't care for clothes."

" I do. But I'm not as clever about them as Clare."

" She is so clever that she'll land me in the workhouse if I don't look out," said the Major.

" You must reason with her," said Christian.

" You might as well reason with an eel. You know all about her, Christian. I wonder if you could do anything ? "

" About her extravagance ? "

" About that and everything else. She pays no attention to me."

" She would if you put your foot down."

The Major said no more just then, but he thought to himself that he was forever trying to put his foot down and that the elusive creature he wished to trample on for her good and his own, invariably escaped smiling. He did not know what to say or do next and he wondered what vexatious surprises the New Year would bring him in the shape of bills. As for Clare's flirtations they worried him less than her extravagance, but he did not like them. The immediate trouble was that he did like Oliver and wished his wife had not got hold of the young man. If he discovered that she was taking valuable presents and even money from him, something would have to be done to stop her. The whole situation was perplexing and insufferable and as the evening wore on the Major began to feel more and more throttled by it. He was rapidly getting into that state of mind when a man brings on the very catastrophe he dreads because he would rather know the worst than continue in uncertainty.

When his dance with Christian came to an end he took her into the refreshment room to get an ice, and as there was a crush he was not served quickly. By the time he had taken her an ice and had a whisky and soda himself the band was striking up for the next dance which was the waltz Clare had promised him. She was not in the refreshment room and when he went

into the ball-room she was not there. So he made his way up to the balcony where a few couples were sitting out ; but she was not amongst them. He could not see Oliver either and he hardly knew now where to look next. However as he came down the stairs, he saw that there was a lighted corridor he had not explored yet and he turned into it expecting possibly to find a card room or a smoking room. When he came to a door he opened it and saw some of the older men playing bridge. He just nodded to them, closed the door and walked on again. It was a wide long corridor with doors on either side, thickly carpeted and dimly lighted. On some of the doors there were brass plates, on some, black lettering showing the business purpose for which each room was used and the one or two he tried were locked. The carpet was so thick that he could not hear his own footfall and the light was so dim that he could not see to the end of the passage. It was quiet here too. The strains of the waltz he was to have danced with his wife sounded a long way off and the clock of the Pavilion striking the half hour made a harsh noisy clang. The Major was in two minds what to do. There seemed to be no one about here and if he went back he would be in time to take Lady Faversham to supper and have a little more talk about rhododendrons. For a moment he halted, undetermined. Then he went on.

XIII

OLIVER did not know the ins and outs of the Pavilion for it had been built while he was away and he had never been to a dance there before. But Clare knew every secluded corner and with some pretence of showing him the card room, had got him past it to an alcove where there was a long padded seat, a comfortable one. She had sat on it with Captain Conway and with others and felt at home there ; and she brought Oliver to it to-night because she wanted no witnesses while she tried to put her spell on him again. It was not going to be easy to get him back, but she had great faith in her own attractions, and like a spoiled child she always thought that whatever she exacted of men must be given.

But everyone knows what it is to have looked forward to an interview and to find when it takes place that the tone of it surprises. You may be agreeably or disagreeably disappointed, but you discover that the other person is not acting or speaking as his wraith did when you had an imaginary conversation with it. The other afternoon when Clare had tried to tackle Oliver, he had not responded as he should have done, but then they had been interrupted by Jane who was hostile to her. They were not quite secure from interruptions to-night, but sometimes you have to take your chance as it comes and Clare could not afford to

wait for a better one. Time was against her. Every day of late had widened the distance that separated her from Oliver and every day took her closer to the moment when, unless he helped her, she must confess her debts to her husband. The thought of doing this was unbearable and drove her to make an appeal that the frigidity of Oliver's manner rendered difficult and humiliating. Not that she was a sensitive woman or backward in attack. She had a deep-rooted belief in her own physical attractions, and regarded most men as ninepins, easily bowled over. Oliver had been easy not so long ago. But something had happened to him. She felt this more strongly than ever to-night when all her incantations left him cold. He certainly was cold, but she certainly was thick-skinned and set on her own aims. She did not mind making love to him. In fact she rather liked it even when he looked decidedly uncomfortable. She liked being near him and she was so far persuaded of her own powers that she expected to melt him at any moment ; although she was wooing his pocket as ardently as his person. She never for a moment considered his feelings but only her own ; and she fell into the common mistake of thinking a man can be battered or cajoled into love making. Perhaps some men can ; but Oliver was not one of them.

" We never had our talk out yesterday," she soon said. " There never seems to be a chance of seeing you quietly. Are you going to take me into supper to-night ? "

" I have asked Christian," said Oliver after a moment's hesitation. " I'm sorry," he added civilly.

" But she doesn't matter. She is only a child. Send her in with a boy of her own age."

Oliver did not speak and Clare edged closer to him so that her shoulder touched his sleeve and her bare arm lay across his clothed one. She put her hand on his when he did not answer and said beseechingly :

" Will you, Oliver ? "

" No," he said, " I can't do that."

" You mean you don't want to."

" I mean what I say."

Clare sighed and went a little closer still. Oliver felt sure that his coat was getting well powdered and he wished he could get away.

" I believe I hear them striking up for the next dance," he said tentatively.

" Never mind," said Clare, her hand tightening on his, " I must speak, Oliver. I haven't a friend in the world except you. If you won't help me I shall drown myself. I've quite made up my mind about it. There is a limit to what one can bear and I've reached it."

Oliver waited ruefully. He knew now what was coming and he had to decide then and there how to meet it. The lady's threats of suicide left him cold, but he was ready to believe that she was in money difficulties again and that he was to have the privilege of helping her out. He did not want to part with his money. What man does under such circumstances ? At the same time his life in the East and his adventures with women had not given him a high regard for them, and coupled with this want of regard there issued from his kindly nature, considerable tolerance for their shortcomings. They were children, admitted in this country to more liberty than was good for them ; and like children, they were pleasure-seeking, irresponsible

and vain. Oliver felt sorry for John Loudon whom he liked, but he felt sorry for Clare too ; because she was a woman and a pretty one. So after waiting a little while for her to speak he patted her hand with his free one and asked her what was the matter. It amounted to three or four hundred pounds this time he found when he had listened to a long story in which every step illustrated Clare's peculiar powers of economy and self denial. Three hundred pounds would enable her to resume her married life and face the New Year with confidence. She would send every penny of it to the dressmaker and let John settle any other little claims that came in. She would not keep a farthing for herself and on the first opportunity she would pay Oliver what she owed with interest. She would indeed. Meanwhile, encouraged by the indulgence of his manner and led on by her own warmth of feeling for him she forgot all need of caution, raised her voice in passionate entreaty and flung herself upon his shoulder with a degree of abandonment that even she had not reached before. She imagined mistakenly that he would like it.

" Will you, Oliver ? " she pleaded. " Will you ? "

" Perhaps I will," said Oliver, " if you'll promise—— "

" I'll promise anything—I'll do anything—— "

* * * * * * *

The seat was in the alcove and the Major came upon it suddenly, but in time to get an ineffaceable impression. His wife was there with Oliver, close to him, clinging to him, putting out all her wiles for him. Her cheek brushed his, her hand clasped his, while Oliver

showed the enduring face of the man who is being wooed not wisely but too well.

" Will you, Oliver ? "

" Perhaps I will. If you'll promise—— "

" I'll promise anything. I'll do anything—— "

It all pointed to an intimacy in which this conversation was but an episode and the Major had heard him accede to Clare's entreaties. He did not understand the situation clearly, but he understood enough. His anger took possession of him as he went forward and when his wife saw him she knew in a moment that a day of reckoning had come. She sprang to her feet and waited. Oliver waited too, wondering what Clare's husband had heard, knowing what he must have seen. His face was impassive but his feelings were not. Both men were furiously angry with the woman who stood between them and both men refused her their esteem, but were inclined to like each other.

" This was our dance. I came to look for you," the Major said to his wife ; for he was a man who could sit upon his anger when it was best to do so ; and he thought it best now.

" Surely it was the next one," said Clare, lying without hesitation ; but she went forward with her husband along the corridor leaving Oliver behind. He did not take the trouble to contradict her but walked steadily on ; and his ominous silence put fear into her as no invective could have done. When they reached the ball-room the waltz they were to have had together was over and Clare's next partner came up to claim her. She hesitated looking at the Major as she was not wont to do, with a little air of apology and a peace-making smile.

" I'm sorry I forgot——" she began ; but the Major interrupted her.

" I'll find out when Christian will be ready to go," he said. " When she is we'll leave."

He walked away from his wife without waiting for her agreement or her remonstrance ; and without realising that he had frightened her for once. She stared after him, certain that a storm of a worse kind than she had known yet was imminent and wondering what she could do to meet it. She saw him go up to Christian and speak to her and she thought Christian must have reminded him that this was New Year's Eve and that no one had had supper yet. At any rate he did not come near Clare again but sat down next to old Lady Faversham who was always delighted to talk to him. Then Clare saw Oliver go up to Christian and when the music started they danced together. After that everyone crowded into the big dining-room for supper and the party of four from Maniton had a little table to themselves. Clare could see them, hear their voices and laughter and sometimes catch what they said, She herself had been taken in by Mr. Sam Bluett, who considered himself a gay dog but was regarded by most women as a bore. Clare detested him, partly because he knew more about her little ways than she wished and put into his manner a breath of roguish understanding that she resented. But she laid herself out to be polite to him to-night, because he was Major Loudon's man of business and any day now she might be driven to seek his support. She did not know what was in store for her that very night when she went home with her husband and was left alone with him. As a rule she made light of his wrath and flouted it ; but

she knew instinctively that she was not going to do so this time. She wondered what his powers were and how far his suspicions would carry him ; and she cast about for some plan of defence. Suddenly with grief and chagrin in her heart she saw one.

The New Year had come. The sirens in the harbour were hooting it in. The clocks of the city had finished striking. The company at supper had risen, sung a verse of Auld Lang Syne and were greeting each other across their tables. Some of the men were moving here and there and Clare looking at Oliver wondered if he would come to her. She wanted him to ; wanted it badly. She rose to her feet with a mind to go to him even if she made herself conspicuous ; and even if she angered her husband more than she had done already. But though she rose she stood rooted to the spot for a moment and then sat down again. All she had seen was the expression of Oliver's eyes as he looked at Christian and took her hand while he wished her a Happy New Year. He did not look long and Christian never raised her eyes at all but blushed and said some word Clare could not overhear. Soon she got up again, for people were moving now, nodded her dismissal to Mr. Bluett and going up to the party from Maniton delivered her good wishes, accepted theirs in return and told Christian that John wanted to go home at once.

" I'm quite ready," said Christian getting up.

" Clare must be ill," said Jane in a stage aside to Oliver. " I expect the oysters have disagreed with her ; but it's rather soon—— "

" What do you mean ? " said Clare angrily.

" You can't be normal if you are going home as

meek as Mary because Major Loudon wishes it. I think better of you, Clare, I admire your conduct as a wife tremendously. When I marry I intend to do likewise. . . . No man shall get me away from a dance till I want to go. At least no husband shall. Oh! Very well, Oliver. If you say I'm coming now I suppose I am. I've just thought of a New Year's wish for you. I hope and pray that you'll marry a woman six feet high who bullies you. I'd love to see it. Good-night, Christian. Happy dreams! Don't forget that you are coming to lunch to-morrow. I'll row across and fetch you if it's fine. Good-night, Clare."

XIV

In those far off days before the war there were not a great many cars for hire in Granfield and Major Loudon had been content to hire an old-fashioned brougham that took the best part of an hour to make the journey. So three silent people jogged along the rough road in the chill of the winter night and for various reasons found the transit more tedious than usual. Christian's thoughts were in a maze; backwards and forwards between doubt and happiness. The Major fumed and fretted but could not speak in her presence; and Clare was in that state of nervous tension when further self control is a matter of touch and go. The last thing she wanted was a serious break with her husband and she did not know yet whether this was what he meditated. She could have shrieked with impatience as the heavy brougham lumbered along unhurrying and slow.

It was two o'clock when they got home, pitch dark and freezing cold. The house was as black and silent as the night when they entered it and no fires were alight down stairs, for the servants had long since gone to bed. Major Loudon lighted the candles set out for them on a hall table, locked the front door, said good-night to Christian and went into the library where he mixed himself a whisky and soda. As a rule he would have smoked a pipe with it before going to bed; but he did not sit down and he did not smoke. His heart

was hard against his wife and his usually quiet nature set in anger and determination. He would not stand it a day longer. He would have it out with her and bring her to her bearings. Over and over again she had fooled him, but she should not do so to-night. He had seen. He had heard. He believed that he had understood. It was unthinkable that his wife . . . there could be no doubt that she was trying to get money out of Oliver . . . and offering . . . the Major had seen her . . . he could not forget it . . . never would he forget it . . . he had heard her voice . . . pleading . . . passionate . . . she had not pleaded with him like that even in the early days of their marriage, but she was his wife and not the other man's . . . and she had got to behave herself or he would know the reason why.

The Major having emptied his glass went straight upstairs ; not to his dressing-room but to the bedroom where Clare waited for him. She had first of all gone to the glass and made good where she thought it necessary ; a touch of powder, a pin in a straggling wisp of hair, a dead flower removed from her waist and she was ready again ; as fresh as when she began the evening and as alluring. Then she had stirred a cleverly packed fire to a roaring blaze and lighted some candles on the dressing-table so that the large comfortable room was warm and cheerful. The chintz curtains were drawn across the window, two deep easy chairs were on either side of the hearth and a small table with milk and biscuits stood near one of them. She was sipping a glass of milk and nibbling a biscuit when her husband came in. She had not begun to undress yet, but she had thrown off her fur coat and sat there as he

had seen her all the evening in the shimmering frock for which he would have to pay, unless Oliver had paid for it already; and in that case what had been his reward?

Clare, who had a glass of milk in her hand put it down when the Major appeared. She spilt a little as she did this for the glass was full and her hand unsteady. She had never felt afraid of the quiet good natured man she had married, but she felt afraid to-night because she saw directly he came in that his patience had reached breaking point. Her facile endearments were not going to do the trick this time; at any rate not yet. The manhood in him was roused against her and there was going to be a storm she must weather although she hated storms. His very walk had anger in it and an unwonted decision. He was pale and his eyes rested on her with dislike. Even before he spoke Clare began to feel wounded and surprised for the last thing she expected to combat in any man was dislike. For a moment she had the odd inexplicable sensation of being strange to him and seeing him as a stranger. His furious anger seemed to brush away the intimacy of marriage and set them face to face, duellists about to engage. After waiting a moment for him to speak, she got up.

"I'm dead tired," she said, "I can't unfasten this frock myself. Will you do it, John?"

She went a little nearer to him but he drew back and spoke suddenly and angrily.

"What was the price of it?"

"I haven't had the bill yet," said she.

"You know what I mean. Who paid for your ermine? Who gave you those diamonds? Don't try

any of your silly lies again. You can't even stick to the same one. You told Mrs. Sam Bluett that Christian had given you the ermine. I was there when she taxed Christian with her generosity. We neither of us knew where to look or what to say."

"My clothes are not Mrs. Sam Bluett's business, are they?"

"But your debts are mine."

Clare looked at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"It's half past two," she said, "if you want a row can't you wait till to-morrow?"

"By God, I can't," said her husband. "I'll have it out with you to-night and you'll listen to me and give me a straight answer; if you can be straight about anything. You've been taking money from Oliver."

"I've never taken a farthing from him."

"It isn't the first time either. I heard things about you and young Conway . . . but I believed in you."

"You can believe in me now. I'm all right."

"All right! Then what were you doing in Oliver's arms an hour ago?"

"How you put things, John! You make me angry."

"Angry! What have you to be angry about? Don't walk away from me when I'm speaking to you. Come back."

Clare had tried to end the discussion by turning away from the fire and going towards the dressing-table; but her husband got hold of her wrist and stopped her.

"I'm in earnest," he went on, "the sooner you see it the better. I've stood a good deal from you but I'm not going to stand dishonour."

"There is no dishonour."

" No dishonour ! Haven't you any shame ? It's got to stop, I tell you. I won't have you take things from other men—furs—jewels—money—like a damned . . . ."

Clare began to cry. Rough language vexed and frightened her as much as a blow would have done. Besides she imagined that a man in such a temper might pass on to blows ; his grip on her wrist was like steel and when she tried to get her hand away because he hurt he only tightened his grasp. The pain made her flinch, but he did not seem to care.

" We're at the parting of the ways," he said. " In future you'll behave yourself or I'll have nothing more to do with you. Can you understand that ? "

" Let go my wrist. You're bruising it," wept Clare. " I want to get my handkerchief and it's on the dressing-table. What brutes all men are : brutes and fools ! Oliver doesn't care for me."

" I didn't say he did. I saw his face to-night ; but I saw yours too. I felt ashamed of you. Moreover I heard what you were saying and what he replied."

" Then you were eavesdropping ! "

" I heard. How could I help hearing ? And it might have been anyone else. You've no regard either for your own name or mine ; but I'm going to stop it. You won't see much of Oliver in future."

Clare smiled. Her husband had dropped her wrist by this time and when she had fetched her handkerchief she sat down by the fire and crossed her legs so that she showed a great deal of her silk stockings and her silver shoes. Her tears had stopped suddenly, but the effect of them had been to soften her face and make her voice slightly unsteady. She still dabbed at her eyes

now and then and spoke with a catch of her breath when her distress mastered her.

" That's where you're making a mistake, John," she said. " You're in such a hurry to rage at me that you don't give me a chance to explain. I'm just about to see more of Oliver than I've ever seen before ; and so are you—unless I've made the mistake of my life—which isn't likely."

" You've often fooled me before, but you're not going to fool me this time. Don't think it," thundered the Major. " I saw you. I heard you. He promised you—money—I suppose—and you offered him anything—everything—— "

" What horrid minds men have—even men like you," purred Clare as much at her ease now as a bridge player with a long suit at No Trumps. " Oliver had just told me he wishes to marry Christian—— "

" What ? "

" Of course I've seen it coming and I'm not sure that I quite like it. Christian is such a baby and Oliver—well, of course, you think everything of Oliver. I would rather have seen the child marry a man like you. But she is over head and ears ; and so is he for the moment. He has taken her by storm."

" Look here," said the Major. " I saw you. I heard you. What did he promise you ? What did you offer him ? "

" I didn't offer him anything. Really I didn't. He had just told me about Christian and at first I tried to dissuade him. Then I said that at any rate he must wait a year, till she is nineteen ; and at last he said he would if I'd promise to do everything I could with you about it. If you had come a minute sooner and

heard what we were saying you wouldn't have been so unkind to me. I don't want Christian to marry yet. If a man like you can be as hateful as you've been to-night . . . she is much too young . . . you must tell Oliver so when he comes to you about it."

"When Oliver comes to me about it I'll believe your tale," said the Major.

Clare dabbed her eyes, stared at her reddened wrist, got up and stood close to her husband, but with her back to him.

"Will you unfasten my frock now," she sighed. "I can't do it myself. I might have asked Christian but I was so afraid she would say something and I didn't want to listen to her till I had found out what you were going to do about it. Shall you give your consent, John?"

John did not answer. He undid his wife's frock and then went to his dressing-room uncomfortably sure that he had been fooled again but not sure how.

XV

On New Year's morning Christian was playing to herself in her room upstairs, when Clare came into her with the morning post and sat by the fire as if she meant to stay. The step-sisters had not met before because Clare had had breakfast in bed; and as Christian had been staying at Maniton they had hardly spoken to each other since Christmas.

"I had an awful row with John last night," Clare began after she had given Christian her letters. "Did you hear us?"

"No," said Christian, holding her chilled fingers to the fire and resigning herself to hearing all about the row from Clare's point of view.

"I thought you might have, as you are next door. Our walls are thick, but men shout so when they get angry. They have no reticence, have they?"

"I've never had a quarrel with a man so I don't know," said Christian.

"I suppose you're one of Nature's celibates. You don't care for men, do you? I notice you get on better with women. At the same time you ought to be careful."

Christian did not ask in what way. She could not turn Clare out of the room but she discouraged her as well as she could by her irresponsiveness and her silence. Clare, however, was not easily discouraged.

"Women without money have to marry," she went on. "What else can they do? But I can never see why any woman with money of her own should want

to. John isn't a bad old thing, but even he makes himself extraordinarily disagreeable at times. I thought he was going to beat me last night."

"What had you done worse than usual?"

"I hadn't done anything. Men are like that—even the best of them. You'll find out if ever you marry; but I hope you won't think of it for the next ten years. I tied myself up much too young. It is the greatest mistake a girl can make."

"Is it?"

"Yes. I assure you it is. You don't know your own mind when you are just out of the schoolroom and once you are married you can't look at another man. At least if you do there is the devil to pay. Men are such Turks. They fly about like bees themselves but they expect us to live like nuns in a convent, under rule and with our eyes down. Life is very hard on women."

Clare sighed deeply and Christian tried not to laugh, but knew that the corners of her mouth were not as steady as they might have been. The picture of the Major flitting from flower to flower while his oppressed spouse kept indoors like a cloistered nun diverted her.

"I think this is the most hateful month of the year," Clare went on. "Everyone feels flat after Christmas and all your bills come in, and it's beastly weather. What are we going to do with ourselves to-day?"

"I'm going to lunch at Maniton," said Christian looking at her watch. "I must start in ten minutes."

"You're too much at Maniton, darling. You've only just come back from a week there and now you want to be off again. Take my advice and don't go. Disappoint them for once. It will do them good."

"I can't do that. I promised," said Christian. "Jane is coming to fetch me."

"Well, I'm going to be candid," said Clare. "Sometimes it is necessary even if it is disagreeable; and I want to do my duty. We all know you don't go to Maniton for Jane."

"Don't I?"

"No, my child. To put it plainly you go there for Oliver."

"I thought you said I was a celibate and got on best with women."

"I said it because I believe it to be true. But Oliver has hold of you for the time. To tell the whole truth that is what I was quarrelling about with John last night. He threatened to break off with Oliver altogether. He doesn't like a philanderer and he is right. But in the end I persuaded him to wait and see. Mr. Hawke may be serious this time, though one never knows with that kind of man. I suppose you guessed he was in love with me before we went to London."

"It looked like it," said Christian in a low voice.

"Then you know what I mean when I say I don't like what is going on now. You'll only get yourself talked about and that does no girl any good. Oliver is the kind of man who has a wife in every port and always will have."

"I don't believe that," said Christian.

"My dear baby, what do you know about men?"

"I hate talking of it," said Christian and got up. She knew that Clare was a liar, but what she said of Oliver was near enough to the truth to be depressing. Even Christian's inexperience realised that he was a man who had knocked about the world a long time, knew

the paths of adventure and was attractive to women. It was improbable that he contemplated an unbroken run to the grave with a girl of eighteen for his companion.

"I wonder why you look so jolly white and miserable," said Jane when, true to her word, she brought the boat across the creek. "Has Clare been getting at you? She was in a fury last night when she wished us a Happy New Year. Poor old Clare!"

"Why should she have been in a fury?" said Christian; but Jane only winked and told her to steer. They were across in a few minutes and Oliver appeared in time to help them beach the boat. He was a man who somehow always did appear just when he was wanted, thought Christian. He was a man who did what he had to do well, was sure of himself and had reason to be satisfied with his place in the world and his success. He had good business brains and an alert commanding way when dealing with difficulties, a way that seasoned by his common sense went far towards resolving them. In short he seemed just then to be everything that Christian was not and to have all things in his favour. It was unthinkable that he could have any serious purpose behind his kindness to her; unthinkable. She must remember that and steel herself. Jane had run on ahead and he had drawn her arm within his while he helped her slowly up the steep path. He would have done as much for any woman, old or young. Some day she would probably have to dance at his wedding and she would do it with her head high; but to-day his arm held her intimately to his side and he talked to her and looked at her as if she pleased him. When they reached the house he unbuttoned her coat for her and took it off and while they stood there close

together, Wickham came into the hall and sounded the gong for lunch. That destroyed the spell for the moment and during lunch Jane chattered, making plans for the afternoon. She wanted a brisk walk, she said.

" It's bitter cold," said Christian with a shiver.

" I'll look after you," said Oliver. " Let Jane have her walk if she wants it. We'll sit by the fire and I'll show you some pretty pictures ; or would you like to play chess ? "

" What would you like to do ? " said Jane politely to Ambrose.

" I should like a brisk walk," said he.

" I thought perhaps you would. We will have one," said Jane.

* * * * * * *

Oliver had drawn two chairs close to the roaring fire of logs in the library and had placed Christian in one of them. He had not sat down himself yet but stood by the chimney looking at her while he filled his pipe.

" You don't mind smoke, do you ? " he said.

" Not in the least."

" But you don't smoke yourself ? "

" I never have."

" Then don't begin. I'd rather you didn't."

Every now and then during the last few days he had disconcerted Christian by saying something like this ; something personal and intimate implying an interest in what she did or left undone.

" When I want to I will," she said, for although she had been bred as a recluse she had the ideas of her generation and in theory considered that a woman of spirit should do as she pleased.

"Is that a declaration of independence?" asked Oliver.

" I am independent," she pointed out.

" Not at all," he said with mischief in his eyes. " For the next three years you will be under Major Loudon's tutelage, unless you marry before the end of that time in which case you will be under your husband's."

" John does not interfere with me in any way."

" But you might marry someone quite unlike John."

Christian did not deny it because she could not have spoken. Oliver's voice, Oliver's eyes told her what he was about to say and the imminence of it overwhelmed her. He drew his chair as close as it would go to hers, sat down in it and leaned towards her.

" Will you marry me, Christian ? " he said.

She looked at him but did not speak.

" Will you ? " he said again and this time he seized both her hands in his and kissed her full on the lips. She tried to get her hands away but he did not let them go.

" You are laughing at me," she said indignantly, for his eyes were laughing at her astonishment and her confusion.

" Why shouldn't I laugh ? I'm happy. You'll laugh in a moment when you are used to the idea. I can't think why you look surprised. I've known my own mind for a week and tried to make it plain to you ; and I believe I know yours."

" I expect you do," said Christian.

* * * * * * *

" Ambrose and I have been all the way to Granfield and back," said Jane dashing into the room an hour later. " We've had a glorious walk and I should have

enjoyed it if Ambrose had not spoilt my pleasure by proposing to me. Men are so selfish ! "

" Really, Jane ! " said Ambrose.

" You're not going to deny it, are you ? "

" Certainly not, but I think—— "

" Surely you don't mind my telling Oliver and Christian. We all knew you meant to propose again if I gave you the chance, but I never thought you'd do it when we were out for a walk and enjoying ourselves. I'd just thrown a snowball at him too. I've refused him, Oliver, so don't look worried."

" I'm not worried," said Oliver.

Something in Oliver's manner and perhaps a note of elatement in his voice betrayed him to Jane. She looked at her brother, she looked at Christian and she understood. Without more ado she flung her arms round Oliver who was standing on the hearth rug and pulling down his head whispered in his ear. He nodded and extricated himself. She gave a shrill crow of delight, literally sat down on Christian and smothered her with kisses.

" Do you perceive what has happened or do you want me to tell you ? " she said to Ambrose March and added with a loud aside to Christian, " He's very thick."

" What has happened ? " said Ambrose looking about him as if he thought the chimney might be on fire.

" While you were proposing to me in that thoughtless way out in the snow, Oliver was proposing comfortably to Christian over the fire."

" How curious," said Ambrose. " Was it the first time, Sir ? "

" Well, yes, it was," said Oliver.

" What silly things you say," observed Jane. " Come along. We're not wanted here and I'm going across the creek to tell Clare. My to see her face when she hears it!"

" You will do nothing of the sort," said Oliver.

" Why not ? "

" Because I won't have it."

" There ! " said Jane, pointing a denunciatory finger at her brother but addressing Christian. " That's the man you're going to marry, my poor lamb. He'll speak to you like that before you are much older and you'll never stand up to him. I forbid the banns."

" Christian is not a badly behaved school-girl," said Oliver.

" Perhaps she will change when she is more with me. By the way what is going to happen to me ? I can't go on living here when you are married, can I ? "

" Why not ? " said Christian firing up in a way Oliver had never seen before. He looked at her while he spoke to Jane.

" Would you like to go back to school ? " he said.

" I should hate it," said Jane dismally. " I'd almost rather marry Ambrose than do that."

" Don't be silly, Jane," said Christian, putting her hand on the girl's arm and looking defiantly at Oliver. " Of course you'll stay here, in your own home. Why don't you tell her so, Oliver ? "

" It isn't necessary since you have," said Oliver, looking at both girls with amusement. " You'll be mistress of the house. If you can stand her I suppose I can. I'm out a good deal. Confound you, Jane ! "

For Jane, darting at him with the swiftness of her namesake the hawk, had taken him by surprise and ruffled his hair.

XVI

JANE only stayed in the library a few minutes and when she went she took Ambrose March with her. Directly they had gone Christian looked towards the window at the waning light of the afternoon and got up.

"I want to row myself across before it's dark," she said. "It is such a long walk by the bridge. If you will lend me a boat—— "

Oliver drew her close to him and looked down at her; for she was not higher than his heart.

"I'm not going to lend you a boat and you are not going to walk home," he said, "I'll take you back in the car after tea."

"Shall you come in? "

"Yes. I shall come in and see Loudon. I'm going to tell him that we want to be married at once."

"What do you mean by at once? "

"In a fortnight."

Christian looked at him, wide-eyed and startled. "That's impossible," she said, "quite impossible."

"Why? "

"It is."

"Why? "

"Clothes, for one thing."

Oliver sat down with her beside him and taking her hands in his made her listen to him.

"You can buy clothes just as well after we are married as before," he argued, not knowing that men invariably argue in this way and that women turn a deaf ear where they can. "I'll take you to Paris if you like. I'll take you anywhere you choose if you'll come with me. I should hate a long engagement under the circumstances."

"Do you mean Clare?"

She asked the question innocently and knew directly that she should not have asked it and that Oliver was not going to speak of Clare. He hardly moved a muscle, nor did he look angry or embarrassed. Yet she knew that she had trespassed and that whatever his relations with Clare had been she would never hear his view of them.

"I want you to myself," he went on after the hardly perceptible pause that just warned her she was on forbidden ground. "A fortnight is an everlasting time. I wish I'd said a week. I've a good mind to run off with you this afternoon. We'd just get into a car and vanish. However—I suppose I must have patience for a fortnight."

"I'm sure it's impossible," Christian said again; but she found herself cajoled and overborne. By the time they arrived together at Highwood she had consented to anything he wanted. At least he vowed she had when he kissed her again just before they stopped.

"I'm so glad you agree with me," he said.

"But I don't. I know they will never consent."

"I don't mind that as long as you do. We'll run away."

"You take for granted that I shall come."

" Of course I do. You belong to me, don't you ? "

Christian liked that idea so much that she could make no effort to oppose him. She felt carried off her feet by his eagerness and determination, and if he had chosen to hurry her off there and then she would probably have acquiesced. However what happened was prosaic. Oliver went into the library and was soon talking about settlements to Major Loudon who was delighted by the news for more reasons than one, but still wondered why Clare had shown such emotion on hearing of it and been so free with her endearments. The two men had met rather stiffly at first, but when Oliver began to state his errand, the Major felt so much relieved that his stiffness vanished. In one important way then his wife had told the truth last night. He could hardly believe it. But he had to believe Oliver who was saying as plainly as possible that Christian had consented to marry him and that they wished to be married at once.

Meanwhile Christian sat in the drawing-room with Clare, but at first did not break the news. She wanted to but found it difficult.

" I thought you were coming back to tea," Clare said. " I've had such a dull afternoon. John is still sulky and no one has called. Such a New Year's Day ! Did you row back ? "

" No. I came in the car."

" By yourself ? "

" No ; with Oliver."

" Why didn't he come in ? "

" He did. He is talking to John in the library."

" What has he got to say to John in the library ? "

It was one of Clare's irritating tricks to mimic people

when she was annoyed with them and to mimic them badly. Her natural voice was strident while Christian's was low and musical, but when Clare mocked her step-sister she minced and twittered. Christian flushed angrily at this travesty of herself and if Oliver had seen her eyes he would have discovered that his docile sweetheart could be roused.

" I suppose he is telling John that we are going to be married," she said.

Clare received the news in hostile silence and then laughed mirthlessly.

" So you've pulled it off," she said. " How clever of you ! "

It was hateful. It was depressing. Christian would have liked to run up to her own room and stay there. She rose restlessly and went to the window, looked at the wintry garden and wondered how much longer the two men would be.

" I suppose Oliver likes the idea of a child out of the nursery," Clare went on, " men who have knocked about as he has, often do. They forget that children grow up. Of course I'm delighted that you are going to marry so well, Christian, as far as money and position go. I think you are too young, but perhaps John will put his foot down and say you are to wait a year or two."

" I expect Oliver has a foot too," said Christian from the window. She had sat down there though it was cold, and from where she sat looked sideways at Clare's profile and at the slender lines of her figure. Christian felt angry with Clare, but she felt rather sorry for her too. Clare was losing Oliver and remaining with John who was excellent but dull ; and she was troubled a

little about her debts and was not as young as she had been ; for at eighteen a woman of twenty-eight seems past her first youth and within sight of middle age.

" You've found that out already, have you ? " said Clare. " My good girl, you won't be able to call your soul your own. Oliver has Eastern ideas about women. He is a hundred years behind his times. I've often told him so."

Christian did not answer. In her present mood she did not particularly want to call her soul her own. She had given it to Oliver with all the rest of herself that he cared to take and her one desire was that he should keep her, body and soul, forever. When he came into the room a few minutes later, she could hardly bear the thrill of happiness that his presence gave her now that he considered her his own ; and though she sat there quietly her eyes were lighted for him and the very poise of her figure was responsive and alive. She watched him as he went up to Clare and joined with John in presenting the situation.

" I suppose Christian has told you," began John.

Clare looked at Oliver and looked away again at her husband.

" Christian is only eighteen," she reminded him. " She is too young to tie herself up for life. At that age any man can take a girl by storm."

As if he was glad to move away Oliver strolled across the room and sat down beside Christian.

" Have I taken you by storm ? " he said and laughed easily because she seemed to tell him that in fact he had.

" I don't want a long engagement," he said speaking to the husband and wife. " We are going to be married in a fortnight. Christian has consented."

As may be easily imagined a discussion followed. Major Loudon said the lawyers could not be ready in that time with their settlements and Clare said that if Christian could be hurried and flurried her clothes could not. There must be a trousseau and there must be a wedding and bridesmaids. They would have to go up to London again.

" I'm against that," said John anxiously.

" So am I," said Oliver." What Christian can't get in Granfield or by parcel post she can get when we are married. Why should she want a lot of new clothes just because she is going to live with me at Maniton instead of here ? You want the Vote and yet you won't give up all this clothes nonsense."

" You'll allow her to have a wedding-dress, I suppose ? " said Clare.

" If it wasn't for Jane I'd persuade Christian to be married in tweeds with the pew opener to give her away," said Oliver. " But Jane would kick up such a shindy—— "

" I'm glad you're afraid of Jane," said Christian a little later when she was left alone with her lover for a few minutes, " I should hate to be married in tweeds."

" But you would have done it ? "

" Should I ? "

" Of course you would," said Oliver and kissed her.

" But someday I shall come to my senses," she told him, " I shall find my feet again."

" I like you as you are."

" Clare says you have Eastern ideas about women."

" Nonsense ! What does Clare know of my ideas ? Where is she ? I want to speak to her."

" By herself ? "

" Yes ; for a moment. You don't mind, do you ? "

" Certainly not," said Christian ; but she did a little. However it could not be helped. What Oliver wished must be done.

* * * * * * *

Clare came slowly across the floor towards him. Christian had found her upstairs and told her that Oliver was still in the drawing-room and wanted to see her.

" I've brought you this," he said and put an envelope in her hands. She opened it, saw the cheque and became more cheerful.

" Of course I ought not to take it," she said perfunctorily.

" Why not ? I'm as good as your brother-in-law."

" Yes ! It's queer. I can't understand it."

" Can't you ? "

" No. You're not a man to live on bread and butter and of course everything must be at an end between you and me ; mustn't it ? "

" If ever there was a beginning there must certainly be an end," said Oliver. " But—— "

" What a brute you are," said Clare. " You know I'm very fond of you."

Oliver could not tell Clare that the only person she was very fond of was herself, so he looked non-committal and said nothing.

" You know I am," she said again.

" You won't be next time you get into debt," he said. " I want to remind you, Clare, that a married man can't allow himself these little pleasures. You must cut your coat according to your cloth."

"How can you when you have no cloth? I had an awful row with John last night."

"I'm not surprised."

"He accused me of taking money from you."

"How wrong of him!"

"Yes. I told him I never had. I don't count the ermine and the pendant. You gave me those, didn't you?"

"Of course I did."

"I had to tell him you were going to marry Christian."

"The devil you did!" cried Oliver. "How did you know?"

"Of course I knew. So did Jane. She made the match, the little beast."

"I thought I'd made it myself."

"You would. Men with your ideas about women are always led by them."

"What are my ideas about women?"

"You don't respect and trust us as you should. I've often noticed it."

XVII

THE fortnight for which Oliver had stipulated stretched into six weeks and then everything had to be hurried. He had always said that if ever he married at all he would be married without any fuss and now elderly relatives on both sides were filling up both houses and the whole neighbourhood was sending presents and coming to the wedding. Christian was to have eight bridesmaids although she had only wanted Jane and at night there was to be dancing at Highwood. Clare lived in a whirl of excitement that she thoroughly enjoyed, and it was only at rare moments when she was alone with Oliver that she remembered that her heart was broken. Her behaviour to Christian varied with her moods. Sometimes she was playful and magnanimous ; the woman making way for the girl and hiding her pain. Sometimes when she forgot her part she turned slightly acid ; and nearly always when she met Jane there was a squabble. With John she had made it up, forgiving his suspicions and the undeserved brutality of his behaviour. She had paid most of her debts out of Oliver's cheque and Christian was presenting her with a new frock for the wedding.

Oliver complained, as lovers will, that he saw nothing of Christian and he would not admit that this was his own fault for hurrying on the marriage.

" I can't think why there should be so much to do," he said. " It isn't as if we had a house to furnish. You are just going to walk out of John's home into mine. If we had everything to choose and buy that would take time. I don't know where we are going to put all these presents, but we can settle that when we get back."

Christian assented. The furniture and decorations at Maniton were old-fashioned, but she did not mind. She liked the idea of going to live with Oliver in his home as he had always known it, and the last thing she wanted at that time was to pull it to pieces in order to create a modernity of her own there. Moreover if she had wanted it, Oliver would have scouted such ideas ; and Oliver was not going to be an easy man to persuade. She was to have her own room and her own piano and books in it as she had had at Highwood and she had chosen this room one afternoon when Oliver had taken her all over the house ; or rather she had looked at the one he had chosen for her.

" I'll get this painted and papered for you," he said, going up to the window and examining a catch that seemed to be slightly out of order. " Now come along and see the bedrooms."

Maniton was a good sized, well planned house and it seemed to Christian that there were rooms of all shapes and sizes on this corridor and on the one above ; but Oliver stopped longest in a large one looking across the creek out to sea. It had a good dressing-room attached.

" You can lie in bed and watch the sailing boats," he said, standing with her near the window while in both their minds fleeting, half-seen pictures rose of

their future life together to which he was going with eagerness and she with dedicated rapture.

"Would you have liked new things here," he said coming away from the window after a time. "If you would we will get them in London."

"I should like a new carpet and new chintzes and if possible a new paper and white paint," she said at once; for the room, though handsomely furnished was gloomy at present because it had brown paint, a Brussels carpet with a brown ground and hangings of crimson damask. Oliver stared at her in surprise and sat down with her on a sofa at the foot of the great four-post mahogany bedstead.

"You do know your own mind sometimes then," he said.

"I always know my own mind."

"This is the first time you have said you wished anything altered."

"You have never asked me before. You have always said the house was to stay as it is."

"Do you want it altered?"

"No," said Christian looking up, as a woman will, at the man she is about to marry, in search of qualities she has not discovered yet but assuredly must discover in the intimate years to come. He had not spoken angrily and he hardly knew that he had spoken curtly till he saw her colour and show signs of distress.

"I shall have to be careful," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"You're easily upset—by a word—by a look."

"I never have been. I don't know why I am now."

"I wish I could upset Jane," he said presently. "Short of a dog whip I don't know how to make any

impression on her. She wants to stay here by herself while we are away and I won't have it."

"Why not?"

"My dear girl, she isn't eighteen. You can't leave a child like that to play about by herself for two months."

"I suppose you would leave me here if you had to go away?"

"I don't mean to go away unless I take you with me."

"What do you want Jane to do?"

"I've given her a choice. She may either stay here with Miss Millet to look after her or she may stay at Highwood. John has said they would have her if I wished it."

"But Clare and Jane are like cat and dog."

"I can't help that. If she can't stick Miss Millet she must stick Clare, unless she goes back to school."

They had been on their way downstairs as they talked and now arrived in the library where Jane was waiting tea for them. She did not seem to be at all depressed by the plans her brother was making for her, but said before long that she had decided to stay at Maniton and felt sorry for Miss Millet.

"What do you mean?" said Oliver flaring up, but Jane only winked at him and helped herself to hot scones; while Christian who had never heard of Miss Millet asked who she was and where she usually lived. She was told that Miss Millet had once lived for a short time at Maniton as governess to Jane and that her father had been the Rector of a small living near Granfield. At his death she had been left penniless and the ladies of the district had done their best to befriend her. Two or three of the most active minded

had recommended her wherever they could and made it their business to place her when she was out of work. She was not easy to place because she had had no education to speak of and did not care for children ; so that the only career open to her seemed to be the precarious one of companion. She had just quitted a post of this kind from no fault of her own when Oliver, calling at the Favershams, happened to say that he did not know what to do about Jane while he was away. Before he knew where he was he found himself engaging Miss Millet as a chaperone until his return, when she was due at another house in the neighbourhood. It all fitted exactly, said Lady Faversham. Jane, dear child, would prefer a former governess to a stranger ; Miss Millet would be provided for till she went to her next job and Oliver could have a quiet mind on his honeymoon. The trouble had come when he went home and told his sister what he had done. There had been a battle royal.

" I rather like old Milly but I don't want her here," she said to Christian. " She will be in my way and I shall have to look after her. I think I shall run up to London and marry Ambrose. I wonder if I am a marriageable age. I must look it out in Whitaker."

" We shall soon be back and there will be the rooms to see after. You've promised to do that, Jane."

Jane gave a contemptuous snort.

" I suppose Oliver has just told you which rooms you may have and promised you a new set of cretonnes if you are good. You ought to have made him do up the whole house. It wants it. When once you are married he'll tyrannise over you just as he does over me. Don't say I didn't warn you."

" I won't," said Christian laughing ; but presently as he took her home she asked him if some arrangement could not be made for Jane that she liked better than the companionship of Miss Millet who sounded elderly and silly. But she saw at once that he did not like being asked and did not mean to change his plans. As they went through the garden together she was silent because she had not moved him, but she walked close to him, soon to be his own. A few days later as she went slowly up the aisle to be made his wife she raised her eyes to his when she arrived beside him ; and the poignant moment seemed to overwhelm her. She looked so white that Oliver thought she was frozen by fear, but when he took her hand in his the colour came back to her face. After that she was herself again, a smiling bride and not a tearful one.

" Thank heaven," said Oliver. " I hate a crying woman. But I thought you were going to faint. Did you feel like it ? "

" I felt nothing till you took my hand. I believe I was dead."

For the rest of the afternoon he watched her and wished the feast was over. She did not belong to him yet. All these dressed up chattering people made claims on her. She stood amongst them, a slim enchanting figure, she cut the cake, she listened to Jane's nonsense, she did the right thing and said the right word. Oliver had not expected so much grace and composure ; Clare, like a gorgeous butterfly, hovered near and at one moment contrived to get Oliver to herself and whisper to him :

" You will be good to her ? " she said with a sigh.

" I hope so," he answered.

" You must remember what a child she is and that her mother is dead."

" Yes," he said and as soon as he civilly could walked away to Jane who was finishing an ice.

" Well, Jane ! " he said.

" Well, Oliver ! Get me another. I've only had three. What was Clare saying to you just now ? "

" Nothing much."

" I know. She was telling you to be kind to Christian and reminding you that she was an orphan. I always know when she is pulling out the pathetic stop. Her mouth goes so."

" Be quiet, Jane. She'll see you. Where is Christian ? "

" Gone to change her things. I must go after her. I say, Oliver—— "

" What now ? "

" I'm rather sorry for Christian really."

" Why ? "

" Going away by herself with you. I shouldn't like it myself. I never realised before what being married meant. It would be much nicer for her if I came with you."

" Heaven forbid ! "

" In former times the head bridesmaid always went with the bride and bridegroom. A very sensible custom too. I expect Christian would be thankful if I came along. I wish I'd thought of it before."

" Good-bye Jane and be a good girl."

" I'll come if you say the word."

" I don't say it, you goose. Run away ! "

Jane kept beside her brother as he made his way out of the room to change his own clothes and then went

upstairs where she found the step-sisters together. Christian was ready for her journey and her wedding finery was on the bed. Her flowers were there too and scented the air. She was visibly relieved when Jane appeared, and gave that young woman the impression of having listened to something she did not want to hear.

"I wish you were taking a maid with you," said Clare. "Oliver is so critical and if you are not always just right he won't be pleased. I know so well what annoys him."

"Pity you can't go yourself," said Jane. "I've just offered to, but he won't have me. You look ripping, Christian, only you want a touch of rouge. Shall I get you some of Clare's?"

"You know I never use it," protested Clare; and then said it was high time to go down.

"What had she been saying to you?" whispered Jane lagging behind a moment with the bride.

"She talks as if I was Oliver's second wife and she had been the first one," said Christian half laughing, half mortified. "She says that he is difficult and I am ignorant."

"Don't you worry," said Jane and gave her new sister-in-law an affectionate squeeze. "What you want to remember is that Oliver is jolly lucky to get you. Promise to say that to yourself three times a day. Promise."

"Hasn't she made promises enough to-day?" said Oliver who overtook the two girls in a corridor and heard the end of what his sister was saying.

"They are all the wrong kind," said Jane. "Mine was in the nature of an antidote."

XVIII

THEY went to Italy by slow stages, staying a night or two in London and nearly a week in Paris. Oliver enjoyed Paris, and Christian acquiesced in anything that he proposed. Such minor facts as journeys and hotels were of no importance compared with the overwhelming fact of being his wife. The ceremony of marriage did not seem enough to bridge the gulf between her maidenhood and this surprising state of things when they were one ; with illimitable rights on his side and an initiation that took her breath away on hers. She could not get over the wonder of belonging to him and finding herself always with him in a happy intimate world of their own. Sometimes she looked back with surprise to the days when he had had neither eyes nor ears for her and when she had watched him with a restless longing that showed her her own heart. They hardly ever spoke of Clare. He did not seem inclined to, and Christian was as quick to respect his reserves as she was sensitive to the least change in his mood. Where he led she followed. Once she had put her hand in the fire to please him and she believed that she was going to live out her life in a passion of love and duty that mysteriously made his will hers. She knew that the reasons for his supremacy could not be expressed in terms of age or politics but lay deep at the root of things in his sex and his nature. Yet docile as she was he amused her at times by his matter

of course view of their relationship. He commanded ; she obeyed. Naturally. How else could the world go round ? If there were rumblings in the world, awakenings and mutinies threatening an immemorial social law, he did not hear or mark them. In a sense he was unselfish ; perhaps rather unusually so. She had wanted to go to Italy ; so he took her to Italy and for her sake spent long hours in churches and galleries. He let her have as much sight-seeing as he judged was good for her, but not as much as she wanted. She would have gone on though she was tired and when he found this out he would not allow it. He never argued or hesitated. He said "Come," and she came at his bidding. She knew that he had a quick temper and wondered whether she would ever rouse it ; but if they fell out they would kiss again. She was not afraid of him in that way.

One day when they were at Lucca, they planned an excursion in one of the electric trams that started close to their hotel and they missed it by a minute because Christian was not ready. There would not be another for hours and next day they were leaving Lucca for Pisa ; so it was annoying. Christian had flown downstairs only to find Oliver coming back to the hotel looking as put out as a man does under such circumstances.

" My shoe-lace broke," she said breathlessly. " I had to find another. I'm so sorry, Oliver."

" It doesn't matter," he said ; but she knew it did. She wanted above all things to appease his anger and she turned into an empty sitting-room just off the hall, expecting him to follow ; but when she looked he was not there. She waited a little and then went up to

their own rooms which were in the old Arnolfini palace and faced a charming corner of Lucca. For some time she stood at an open window, staring absently at ancient houses and gardens, at the great doors of the cathedral and at the desultory traffic of the glaring afternoon. Oliver was angry with her and that troubled her exquisitely. He could not be very angry and when he came back he would forgive her ; but she hoped he would not be long. The rooms were forlorn without him. She could not go out by herself. He would not allow it in Italy ; nor would she have cared to do it. People stared so. There had been that time at Genoa when she had run from their hotel to the glove shop just across the piazza to get some gloves for Jane. A young officer had followed her into the shop and insisted on acting as interpreter. She had been quite glad of his help, but he had walked out of the shop towards the hotel by her side, steering her amongst the thick traffic there of trams and carriages ; and in the front door of the hotel stood Oliver looking surprised. The officer had vanished and Oliver had only laughed, but he had said she must not go out alone again as long as they were abroad. Perhaps while she waited she had better finish her packing. She had only brought one small trunk because Oliver liked to travel light, so she had bought such things as gloves, embroideries and photographs for presents : things that took no room. She did not mind. There are states of the spirit so possessive and absorbing that ordinary desires are deadened for the time and Christian still found that her wishes did not persist when they clashed with Oliver's.

She was kneeling beside her trunk when he came back

again and when she rose hastily to meet him he took her in his arms.

"You've been away two hours," she murmured.

"I thought you never cried," said he and made her look at herself in the glass when she vowed she had not been and was not crying. Then they went out together and had a long wandering walk first in the little town and then round the ramparts bidding good-bye. They stood beside Hilaria's tomb again, they strolled through the market that had once been a Roman amphitheatre, they watched men beating copper in their open shops; and while they sat in San Michele they were startled by the sudden dramatic entry of a coffin borne by Brothers of Pity in their black dominoes and accompanied by one grief-stricken mourner and by a priest. On the ramparts they sat down for a time and looked at the Guinigi tower with the bird-sown ilex trees on its summit and at the tower of San Frediano in the sunset light. The tenderness of reconciliation made the hour golden and Christian felt the exaltation of spirit that succeeds to tears when the cause for tears has gone.

"But you were very angry," she sighed, putting a detaining hand on his arm as they were about to go down to dinner.

He looked down at her ruefully.

"I didn't say so," he pointed out. "If it had been Jane I should have stormed at her."

"It is better to storm than to go away."

"I can't storm at you. Jane is different. She isn't a dove."

"I couldn't help my shoe-lace breaking."

"Were you unhappy while I was away?"

"You know I was—you saw——"

They went down together and next to them at table found two new arrivals, English and evidently honeymooners. They were so near that they could not help hearing everything their country people said and they soon felt sorry for the man. Everything was wrong; Lucca was a hole with no shops and no theatres; the hotel had no proper lounge and what is a hotel without a large luxurious lounge? That wine in flasks that everyone was drinking? Certainly not. She would try sparkling Asti, but would probably not like it. Cheese in the asparagus sauce so that the flavour was spoiled of the asparagus. And no ices but only a sweet like egg flip. What a dinner! what a place! Why hadn't they gone to the French Riviera as Aunt Louisa recommended? The best hotels on the French Riviera were what anyone used to the amenities of life chose if they must leave their own country. Even the oranges here were inferior to what you could get at Harrod's at home.

"If that woman belonged to me I'd beat her," whispered Oliver and Christian looked hastily at the other bride to see if she had heard. She had a feeble discontented face, with a pretty colour and pretty hair; and her airs were the airs of a spoiled undisciplined child. Christian wondered why her amiable young husband had married her and how their lives would go on. In the hall, where they drank coffee after dinner she scolded him, first, because he could not get her an English paper and then, because he did not fetch and carry quickly enough with cushions and wraps. When at last he was allowed to sit down she turned her back on him and looked at Christian. The moment she did so Oliver spoke to his wife.

" Get your hat. We'll go for a stroll," he said.

Christian had not quite finished her coffee, but she got up at once and came down a few minutes later to find her husband waiting for her at the front door. He took her cloak and they went out together into the square, where there were seats and trees and lights with a full moon shining in a blue sky.

" Shall we sit down ? " said Christian.

" If you like. Are you tired ? "

" A little. Why did you send me off in such a hurry ? I hadn't finished my coffee."

" That woman would have spoken to you in another moment."

Christian laughed and pinched his arm, for they had found a seat without much light on it and were sitting there contentedly while he smoked his pipe.

" You ought to have married her and I ought to have married him," she said.

" Why ? "

" You would have been good for her."

" I should hate a cat and dog life," said Oliver. " A man wants peace in his own home."

" Peace and right supremacy."

" Is that a quotation ? "

" Yes ; from the *Taming of the Shrew.*"

" Thank heaven you're not a shrew. Anyhow I like you just as you are. You must never change."

" I must grow older."

" We shall do that together."

" And wiser ! "

" Impossible ! " cried Oliver knocking the ashes out of his pipe and getting up. " You've proved your wisdom by marrying me."

" Jane said that I was to tell myself three times a day that you were lucky to get me."

" Jane has gleams of sense at times. I know I am."

" But I always seem to see things the other way round, Oliver."

She had not risen yet and he could see her face in the moonlight lifted to his, wistful and half serious.

" Did you tell Jane so ? " he asked.

" No. Of course not, but she knows. I believe everyone knows. It is annoying. I don't want to be a silly sort of Griselda in the twentieth century. At least I don't really mind being one to you, but I'd rather other people didn't know it. Do you see what I mean ? "

" Not very clearly. I see you are worrying yourself about something ; about what other people think apparently. What do other people matter to you and me ? "

" Nothing I suppose ; but I don't want to be a door-mat, Oliver."

" A door-mat ! "

" Under your heel ! "

" I thought you said just now that you didn't mind ! Not that you are one or that I want you to be one. I should hate it. But are you sure that you know what you want ? No, you are not. You are tired and this afternoon you were upset ; and I lost my temper for which I'm sorry. Come along now. We've a journey to-morrow and you ought to be in bed. A fortnight to-day we ought to arrive at Maniton. You are going to be the mistress of Maniton, my dear."

" But you will be the master."

" Well, I can't help that," said Oliver.

XIX

THEY arrived at Granfield on a warm April afternoon and were met by Jane who seemed to be in the best of health and spirits.

"How do you like being Oliver's wife?" she said the moment the car moved off with them. "Is he nice or horrid? You look very well. I suppose he hasn't begun to be horrid yet. People don't on honeymoons, do they?"

"Your man will if ever you find one," said Oliver. "I wonder how Miss Millet has put up with you and what you have been doing. You said remarkably little in your letters and you never answered questions."

"That's the best of letters," said Jane. "Questions can be ignored."

"When did Miss Millet go?"

"She hasn't gone. I kept her because I knew she was dying to see the bride arrive. She is as romantic as a novelette, silly little fool! Are you going to carry Christian into the house? We all hope you will."

"I hope you won't," cried Christian. "My hat would probably fall off."

"You won't be asked," said Jane. "You'll just be picked up and carried into your lord's house. The Hawkes always bring their brides home that way; and

the Hawkes always marry doves, like you. That's why I'm thinking of Ambrose. At least I did at one time, but lately I've had other ideas. A star of the first magnitude is shining in this neighbourhood and is attracted by me. That's natural."

The car stopped at Maniton as Jane was speaking. Christian saw that the front door stood open and that all the outdoor and indoor servants were there to see the master bring his bride home. The only person unknown to her was standing a little apart and was obviously Miss Millet. Christian just had time to note that she had mild blue eyes, a spare figure and cheeks like a withered apple when she was taken by surprise ; for as she stepped out of the car Oliver picked her up and carried her over the few shallow steps and across his threshold before she could stop him. Her hat did not fall off, but she was as red as a rose when he set her down and while Jane and the servants cheered and crowded near she hardly knew whether she was on her head or her heels.

" Such a savage custom but so picturesque," murmured Miss Millet. " Quite a relic of old times."

Then she was presented to the bride and Christian talked to her civilly on the way to the library where tea was ready for them. Jane, it appeared, was on the best of terms with her, but they were not the terms usual between a girl of seventeen and the elderly woman put in charge of her. Jane took charge of Miss Millet.

"Now then, Milly, come along," she said when the dressing gong sounded. " You know you're always late for meals unless I see to you, and you mustn't be late to-night. Oliver would make one mouthful of you

and none of us would ever hear you twitter again."

"Really, Jane!" protested Miss Millet who was being propelled towards the door, although she had dropped her ball of knitting silk and was making jerky ineffectual dives for it.

"Nor would you be able to tell him all the dreadful stories about me that you've been saving up ever since you came. You shall have him all to yourself after dinner and tell him what you really think and what happened the day Mr. Padstow came to lunch."

"JANE!"

"Why are you making those little dips? We are not in the sea; or are they curtseys? Oh, your wool! What an untidy pet you are! Here, give it to me. Now then."

"JANE! I will not have it. Put me down at once."

"Now you know what Christian felt like," said Jane; for, as if inspired by Oliver's example, she had picked up the little woman in her muscular young arms and set her down at the foot of the stairs; while Oliver and Christian, trying not to laugh, followed at a distance.

"You didn't expect that, did you?" Jane went on. "Yes, put your hat straight. I hope you've kept out your best frock to wear to-night. We want to make a good impression."

"I don't know what Mr. Hawke must think," prattled Miss Millet, "my charges are usually most respectful to me, but you don't seem to know the meaning of the word. I should not like it to be generally known that whenever you are in a hurry you pick me up and carry me. I can't help being short and light——"

"Not light, my pet. I should never describe you as a light woman. I'm rather shocked at your suggesting it, but let us hope they didn't hear."

"JANE!!"

That seemed to be Miss Millet's only weapon of defence: to say Jane's name in the largest capitals, to look half thrilled, half horrified and to blink her eyelids. She was a curious looking person with scanty hair neither grey nor blonde but between the two. Her frame was spare and bony and her manner inclined to be "bright." She came down to dinner in a checked silk that reminded you of dusters, and a fichu trimmed with home-made lace. She sat bolt upright in her chair, stared in a fascinated way at Oliver and Christian and by way of making conversation observed that she liked cats better than dogs.

"I always think that cats are like ladies *should* be," she said addressing herself to Jane. "They are soft and quiet. Dogs remind me of gentlemen; very handsome and brave no doubt but rather rough in their ways. No, George! Down, sir, down! Oh, do call him off, Jane!"

For Jane's new Sealyham pup had just bounced into the room, jumped straight into Miss Millet's lap and put two adorable square paws trustfully upon her fichu while he wagged his stumpy tail at her and gazed into her eyes.

"You know you spoil him," said Jane. "That's why he never leaves you alone. Fetch him one behind his ear."

"I couldn't do that," said Miss Millet and looking ingenuously pleased she got up because Oliver was offering her his arm into dinner.

"Millykins is a teetotaller as a rule," announced Jane as they sat down, "but the day Mr. Padstow came to lunch——"

"Jane!" said Miss Millet. "I beg that you will refrain from unseemly reminiscences."

"I was going to tell Oliver that we had only used one bottle of wine out of his cellar in two months. I thought he would be pleased. We had to have some the day Mr. Padstow came to lunch and brought me George, but we only had claret. To-night we are going to drink the health of the bridegroom and bride in champagne, Millykins, so do be careful. Even my head won't stand more than three glasses."

"You'll only have one glass," said Oliver. "Christian may have two if she likes."

"I should not like it at all," said Christian. "Half a one is enough."

"Not to-night. You're tired. A full glass will do you good."

"I horrified Mr. Padstow by telling him that Millykins and I always drank water," narrated Jane. "'Water!' he said. 'Water! What you wash with!' Here's to you, dears! A long life and a merry one!"

After two months of marriage Christian could interpret her husband's manner and the pleasant level tones of his voice. If she did not drink the champagne he would probably say nothing about it but he would not be pleased. This was her first evening in her new home as Oliver's wife and as she lifted the brimming glass to her lips she looked at him over it and they drank to each other.

"Are you going to be a down-trodden simulacrum

like me ? " inquired Jane at dessert, " or are you going to assert yourself ? I hope you will."

" I hope she won't," said Oliver. " If there is anything odious in this world it is a managing woman. You'll be one, Jane, when you're older, unless you are warned by me."

Jane got up, carried her chair close to her brother and sat down again with her head on his shoulder.

" I'm so glad to see you back," she said with tenderness and both Christian and Miss Millet were startled when Oliver instead of responding made a dash at her wrists and held them firmly in his own hands.

" She was going to ruffle my hair," he explained.

" I'm afraid she has no respect for persons," murmured Miss Millet.

" Are you going to let Christian be mistress of the house or are you going to bully her as you do me ? " demanded Jane.

" I'm going to bully her as I do you."

" Christian, are you going to stand up for your rights or must I fight your battles for you ? "

" Really, Jane ! " murmured Miss Millet, and then rose because Christian did and left the room with her and with Jane.

But that evening when they were by themselves Christian told Oliver that she wanted to keep house for him and not leave everything to Mrs. Stoughton.

" So you shall," said he, glad to be alone with her and lifting her hand, as he sometimes did, to look at his ring on it. " But what do you want to change ? We are very comfortable and Mrs. Stoughton knows all about housekeeping. I expect you'll find it's best to give her her head."

However, next day, with a show of deference, Mrs. Stoughton introduced the new mistress to those regions that are never on view but on which the ease and health of domestic life depend. Christian, unlike Jane, thought that store cupboards and linen-cupboards, glass and silver, cellars and garrets were all interesting, but she recognised that as long as this housekeeper reigned at Maniton the mistress would be what Jane called a simulacrum. She was a pleasant capable woman, but used for years past to her own way. She ordered the food, managed the maids, squabbled with Wickham and spent a good deal of money. At least Christian thought she was extravagant, but Oliver would not have anything altered. He was generous with money, she found, but methodical about accounts and impatient of confusion or mistakes. A good deal of the money spent in the house passed through her hands now, and at first, if there was a deficit in the budget, she made it good out of her private purse. But he soon found that she was doing this and stopped it. Then he kept a business eye on her money affairs and invested small sums for her that she would have spent in various ways.

"I should like to give Jane a new carpet for her bedroom," she said one day when he had come into her room about some accounts.

"Why? Is hers worn out?"

"No; but it is ugly."

"Let her have one from another room then."

"There are none that she likes. She wants a blue Axminster. Do let me get her one, Oliver."

"No," said Oliver after a moment's thought. "You are not going to squander your money on Jane and

Clare. I won't have it. Let me see your bank book. It came this morning, didn't it? I've just heard of a good investment and you ought to have enough—— "

He stopped speaking to look inquiringly at his wife. She had made no movement to get him the book and she was looking at her boots which were quite in order and did not require looking at.

" What have you been doing? " he said and in spite of its official severity his voice had tones of affection and amusement in it.

" Can't I do as I like with my own money? " she asked.

" Within limits."

" Who prescribes the limits? "

" Common sense. Otherwise me."

" Then I can't do what I like? "

" Not altogether. Give me that book, Christian."

She had to give it and to wait with her heart thumping against her side while he looked at it and discovered what she had done.

" Fifty pounds to Clare last week! I thought as much, and you know that you might as well put water in a sieve as give money to Clare."

" Yes, I know; but she said she was afraid to tell John."

" She always says that."

" How do you know what she always says? "

" I know that kind of woman," said Oliver vexed with his own slip. " Besides—to tell the truth—— "

" She has borrowed from you? "

" She called it borrowing."

" I felt sure she did. At one time I was very unhappy about it. I thought that she—you—— "

"Well, you don't think so now. But you heard what I said, Christian? You are not to give her money again without my knowledge."

"I'll try not to."

Oliver's temper went off like fireworks at an answer like that. After all he was a man of affairs and she was a child and he would not have her exploited by her step-sister.

"I'm not asking you to try. You'll obey me," he said. "Do you understand? If there is any more of it I'll stop your seeing Clare."

Of course he spoke in a more high-handed way than he should have done. He knew it himself a little later when his wrath had cooled. But the immediate effect on Christian was simplifying. She could not stand up to him when he was as angry as that. She could no more have disputed his commands than she could have wrestled with him physically. What he said was final. It must stand like a shield between her and Clare's ruses.

XX

In some ways Clare was a shrewd woman. When Oliver gave her that cheque for three hundred pounds and announced his forthcoming marriage she knew that a chapter of life had come to a close. Her vanity was wounded and so, she thought, was her heart, but the astute side of her self love assured her that all was for the best. The last thing she desired was to quarrel publicly with John when there was no one to take his place. She valued her social position and the amenities of life in his house and would not have given them up while nothing better offered ; and nothing better did. Besides though she plagued him she was not without regard for him ; especially since he had put his foot down and shown her that there was a limit to what he would stand. Life was dull at Highwood but comfortable ; and a new man had just bought a large house on the other side of Granfield. He was unmarried and said to be a millionaire. Clare concentrated on her summer clothes, made John call on Mr. Padstow and turned Christian's sitting-room into a fourth spare bed-room. She hardly ever wanted four because John would not have many people at a time asked to the house. He said it was too much for the servants and when she suggested keeping more servants he talked of what he could and could not afford. Poor old John ! However it was amusing to redecorate and furnish the room, but surprisingly

expensive. So she showed some of the bills to Christian and borrowed fifty pounds; which was only fair to herself and John.

"You see, darling, you took your own things away and left the room empty," she said to her step-sister. "I had to do something with it."

"What did you do with it before I came?" asked Christian.

"I forget; but you should see how nice it looks now. I really am rather good at doing up rooms. I wish you'd let me try my hand at this one. Don't you find it depressing?"

The step-sisters were sitting together in the drawing-room and Clare had just negotiated the loan that made Oliver so angry when he found it out a few days later. Christian did not want to waste fifty pounds on an undeserving object, but she did not like to refuse. At any rate this time the money had bought solid furniture and not milliner's trash. At least she hoped so. No doubt she ought to insist on seeing the receipted bills but she had not the courage. Clare had sighed and said she was weighed down by care. Life was using her hardly, and this morning she had found two grey hairs. Dr. Martin had said that she needed a thorough change, but she could not get it because John was in one of his parsimonious moods.

"I should like to run up to London with you and help you choose things for this room," she said looking round it, "I suppose Oliver would do it for you. Have you asked him to?"

"No," said Christian.

"Some of the solid furniture is not bad."

"It is very good," said Christian.

" But the curtains and cretonnes are dreadful, and so is the paper. I wonder Jane didn't change things. I nearly did myself when I came here so much in the autumn. Oliver agrees to anything you want if you take him the right way. At least he did as a friend."

Christian was not inclined to discuss Oliver with Clare and changed the subject ; but some weeks later she was staring at the room and wondering whether she would be allowed to take it in hand, when her husband came in and asked her what she was doing.

" I was thinking about this paper and these cretonnes," she said.

" Why should you think of them ? "

" I don't like them. It's a pleasant room."

" It's a delightful room."

It was. It had a big bay window facing the creek and another looking out to sea. It was large, light and not too high. The fire-place was a long way from the door, and the afternoon sun shone on its brasses and its opal tiles. They had been put in by Oliver's father in the eighties, but the furniture, like the house, was late Georgian and satisfactorily plain about its tops and legs. Unfortunately, when Oliver's father married the fashion of the moment was not plain. In that far away age people wrote about the House Beautiful and got it by putting straight rows of enormous sunflowers or cabbage roses on its walls and chairs. At Maniton there had been roses, but now the pinks had turned white and the greens brown. The room was a refreshing medley of timid faded colours and conventional designs. The pictures were Academic. There was one by A. Blank, R.A., worth a thousand pounds. If Oliver would have sold it he could have done up a good many

rooms with the proceeds. But he liked it and would not sell. The trees in the picture were green, the sky was blue, the cows were brown and the river looked like water. That will show you what kind of picture it was and how old-fashioned Oliver's ideas were.

"Come out now," he said to his wife when they had stared at the room together. "We'll have a sail before dinner."

They had their sail. There was nothing in the world so exhilarating as being out on the sea with Oliver when there was just enough breeze to carry them swiftly and silently across the water. He took Christian out for an hour or two whenever he could spare the time, because she enjoyed it so much and as a rule he took no one else, not even Jane. He liked having her to himself, he said; and when the boat let him he would sit still and smoke and look at her, with that little wrinkle of laughter about his eyes and mouth that half teased and half enchanted her. He did not take her seriously yet, she told him; but some day he should when she was older and he knew her better.

"Don't I know you now then?" he said.

"I don't know myself. I change. When you asked me to marry you those faded things were in the drawing-room and I never thought of them or cared. Nothing mattered except being with you. I was possessed. I believe I should be again if you were in danger or away. But when our whole world is a garden I begin to see small imperfections—faded cretonnes, for instance."

Oliver looked at her and said nothing, partly because the boat required his attention. When he had adjusted the sheet they talked of something else, and it was not

till after dinner that night that the question of decorations came up again; and then it was Jane who introduced it.

"About time you did up this frumpish old room," she began, addressing her brother. "Those staring roses are beastly. You seem to forget that Christian is a bride and has a right to have everything new."

Oliver looked straight at Christian as if to ask her whether she had put Jane on to persuade him where she had failed; and his look seemed to warn her, not without amusement, that such tactics were transparent but futile.

"When I marry I shall insist on having even the attics painted and papered," proceeded Jane, "unless I find they were all done last week. Why didn't you insist on it, Christian? Millykins and I could easily have seen to everything while you were away."

"My own rooms were done," Christian reminded her.

Jane made a queer little noise between her nose and her throat.

"That's a snort," she said, "a snort of indignation! You ought to have this room and the dining-room done at once."

"I wish you'd mind your own business," said Oliver. "I'm not going to have workmen in the house again, so you need not suggest it. I've no patience with people who want their rooms turned upside down every minute. If you don't like the walls you can look at the ceiling."

"What a beast you can be at times," said Jane plainly.

Oliver looked at his wife to see if she endorsed this condemnation and he saw that she was smiling faintly

as if her sister-in-law's outspokenness entertained her.

"I'm afraid you agree with Jane," he said later in the evening when Jane had gone into the garden to give George his evening run. "You think I'm a beast."

"Jane only said 'at times.'"

"You agree."

"One doesn't like a beast," she began.

"No."

"Much less love one—so that little things don't matter."

He called her darling, took her in his arms and kissed her; but he did not change his mind about the room; and she did not speak of it again. She was only happy when he was pleased with her, and he certainly would not be pleased if she opposed him. She could only hope that they would never be in serious conflict, with her sense of right driving her to face him. As for the drawing-room they hardly used it except for an hour after dinner. In this warm weather tea was served on the verandah facing the garden and the creek. There were generally people visiting the bride and the day after Jane had called her brother a beast the Favershams came, then the Bluetts and then John and Clare: so that the verandah seemed full of people and Christian was kept busy at her tea-tray. Oliver talked to this person and that, but always seemed to see what his wife wanted.

"You have a most attentive husband, my dear, and so charming," whispered old Lady Faversham, "I'm in love with him myself; but then I always was years ago when he was a little boy."

Christian liked that and flushed prettily as she refilled the old lady's cup.

" I should like to see that portrait of him again," Lady Faversham went on, " the one painted when he was seven years old. I recommended the artist and at the time it was a wonderful likeness."

" It isn't now," said Jane, who was standing in front of the closed doors leading into the drawing-room. " No one can say that Oliver is a chubby little angel with big blue eyes and curls."

" Well, I should like to see it," said Lady Faversham getting up. But Jane, with an inflexible face stood in front of the door.

" Open the door, Jane," said Oliver.

" I can't," she said turning towards it and pretending to be baffled by the handle.

" Don't be silly," he said in a low voice. " What's the matter ? "

" Look at them. The whole lot are coming."

" Why not ? Let go that handle ! "

With a speaking gesture of repudiation and despair Jane made way for her brother, who opened the door with ease and waited for his guests to pass in before him. They did so. There was a moment of surprised embarrassed silence. People looked at each other. They began to laugh.

" What's the matter ? " Oliver said to Christian and they went into the room too. Jane had disappeared.

XXI

THE drawing-room presented an extraordinary appearance. It was hung in an old-fashioned way with a jumble of pictures and plates at various heights. Some were valuable and some were not, and none of them had ever looked well against a background of enormous roses planted in straight rows interspersed with delirious squiggles. When Christian had seen the room before her marriage, she had seen nothing in it but Oliver, and if it had been hung with oleographs from Christmas numbers she would not have cared ; while Oliver had come into possession of a house he had known all his life and accepted without criticism. Neither Raymond nor he had troubled to change decorations that their parents had thought daring and original forty years ago ; and that they themselves hardly saw because they had seen them every day since they were born. But now that Christian lived in the house she could not take its shortcomings so much for granted and lately every time she went into the drawing-room she wished she might change everything in it except the furniture, which was good and of a much older date than the decorations. Unluckily she had said as much to Jane.

No one but Jane was capable of such mischief. Oliver understood that the moment he entered the room and discovered why a murmur of surprise had

been succeeded by an embarrassed silence and then by a polite chorus of amusement. Jane ! (it could be no one else) Jane had been in there with a stepladder and had moved every picture and every plate from its time-honoured station. She had not altered the grouping. She had just shoved everything a little way to one side and by doing this displayed innumerable patches of the wall paper as it had been once upon a time when the roses were pink and their leaves green and the squiggles amongst them blue. The effect was grotesque ; but Jane had not been content with it. She had taken pen and ink and opposite the chair Oliver always occupied in that room she had given three of the faded roses features turning them with impish ingenuity into caricatures of her brother, Christian and herself. She had tip-tilted her own nose and given her expression the pertness of a cockney sparrow ; Christian looked as meek as a dove ; and Oliver had a chin and a temper but not a twinkle. " The real Oliver " she had written underneath in broken kneed capitals.

" You'll have to do up the room now," Clare said to him. " The little devil has forced your hand."

" Where is she ? " said Oliver looking round, and Christian herself hardly knew from his face and his manner how he was going to take it. She thought that against his will he was amused but angry too. He answered Clare evasively until the other callers had gone and then he agreed with Major Loudon who said that it would have been worse if Jane had imitated the militant suffragettes and destroyed the pictures ; but that a young woman who played such pranks deserved a lesson.

"It waked them up a bit, didn't it?" said Jane, walking on to the verandah as if nothing had happened, but looking a little uncertainly at Oliver. "I hid behind a curtain and heard all they said. Of course I never meant them to go in there. I prepared the room for ourselves to-night. I went to a lot of trouble, but it takes a *coup* like that to convince the male brain which may be solid and superior but is certainly thick. What are you going to do about it, Oliver? Have I convinced you?"

"You can go in and put everything back," said Oliver dryly, and Christian knew then that he was angry, but did not mean to say much before the Loudons. Jane seemed to know it too for she disappeared into the drawing-room and had nearly finished her work of reconstruction there when her brother and Christian went in half an hour later. She was just struggling with a heavily framed reproduction of Dicksee's "Harmony" and finding it difficult to replace, but Oliver stood on the hearth-rug and did not offer to help her. Christian looked at him, but that was all she could venture to do in his present temper; and when she would have gone to Jane's assistance herself he caught her by the arm and prevented it.

"She might fall," murmured Christian, for Jane was standing on the top of a high step-ladder and was trying now to straighten the wire supporting the ponderous frame; but Oliver took no notice and before long his sister came safely down.

"If they had been hung on nails I wouldn't have done it," she said going fearlessly up to her brother. "You see I've done no harm. We can put a little

water colour over our portraits and when you look as savage as you do at this moment I'll take it off and let you see yourself. What a bad-tempered man you are, Oliver. You'd like to beat me, wouldn't you ? "

" I've a good mind to do it or else send you back to school for a year. I'd stop your quarter's allowance if I could trust Christian."

" What do you mean ? " cried Christian ; and Oliver, standing Briton like, in front of his own hearth looked down at two mutineers both flaming at him.

" You'd make it up to her somehow," he said, " probably give her the clothes off your back if she wanted them."

" Well, I heard you tell John I deserved a lesson and should have one," said Jane. " You must keep your word you know. What are you going to do with me ? "

Unfortunately Oliver did not know. Both girls looked adorable and absurdly young ; and in spite of himself the laughter was finding its way back to his eyes and his mouth again. That was partly because the only punishment he could think of was connected with ices and could not be inflicted. He might tell Mrs. Stoughton that no more iced puddings should be made till he gave further orders ; but that would punish Christian too and she had not meddled with the pictures. Besides Jane was supposed to be grown up and past nursery punishments.

" I think I shall do like the king in fairy tales and marry you off to the first man who comes," he said.

" By way of giving me a lesson ! "

" How horrible it must be to have to marry a man because your elders tell you to," said Christian. " I suppose it still happens—in other countries."

" It won't happen in this house," said Jane. " No one will marry me but myself. What I mean is—well, you know what I mean. Oliver, you'll be late for dinner if you don't hurry up. You take such a long time. Christian and I can dress in five minutes and we never look like it so you needn't say so. I hope you've forgiven me because anger is bad for the digestion and I happen to know that there is lobster to-night. I wish you'd make him have champagne with it, Christian, but you never use your influence for good. By the way, did Clare tell you she expected us all three to tennis on Saturday ? "

" Yes," said Christian. " She wants us to meet that new man, Mr. Padstow."

" He isn't new to me," said Jane importantly. " I've met him several times lately. He's a millionaire."

" I should have thought——" began Oliver and then, stopping short, hurried Christian upstairs to get ready for dinner ; but when the three of them assembled again Jane finished his sentence for him.

" I know what you were going to say," she began. " You think Clare would want to keep a millionaire to herself. I suppose you didn't like to say it before Christian, but it's no use being squeamish about Clare. We all know she's a man-eater. She nearly ate you with the bones and the beak, Oliver. If Christian and I had not stood together and rescued you—— "

" Dinner is ready " said Wickham opening the door ; and it was not until he had gone out of the room to fetch the second course that Jane could begin again.

" I'm so thankful there is no buttery hatch in this house," she said. " We do get a moment to ourselves

now and then. I was going to tell you that Clare and I are having a snatching match over the millionaire much as Christian and Clare did over you, Oliver."

At that moment Wickham returned with the lobster mayonnaise and Jane, after helping herself generously, smiled round the table in a way that reminded Oliver of an acrobat's smile after he has done his best trick.

"These exits and these entrances are very hard on some people," she ran on. "Say it in French, Oliver. *Mal elevée* is the phrase you want. I'm very *mal elevée*. But I should like to know who is responsible for that. Not you at any rate. You just came back and found me—as I am; and I assure you that at the present moment I'm being much admired."

"Who is Mr. Padstow, and what is he like?" said Christian to her husband. "Do you know him?"

"I saw him once in Bluett's office," said Oliver.

"He has two eyes, one nose and a mouth," said Jane. "That's all you'll get out of Oliver or any other man. They can never describe people. They call it gossip and say they're above it. Why don't you ask me? I can tell you about him. He confides in me. He isn't a bad old thing at all and he's simply rolling."

"Stop it, Jane," said Oliver in a low voice and Jane stopped it till Wickham had carved a chicken, served it and departed again.

"I can be as *mal elevée* as I like now, can't I?" she said. "But I must be quick because Wickham will be back directly. I can't think why you mind Wickham. I don't because he held me in his arms when I was born. At least he says he did. I always consult him before I do anything important such as marrying for instance; so of course I want him to hear

all about my millionaire. But the worst of Wickham is that you always know exactly what he'll say. He won't approve of my marrying for money. He is very Victorian and romantic ; rather like you, Christian."

" I hope you are not going to marry for money," said Christian. " How old is Mr. Padstow ? "

" About fifty I should think ; but he is what people call well preserved."

" Has he asked you to marry him ? " said Oliver.

" Not yet. I haven't given him a chance, because I haven't made up my mind. You don't know how these things are done, Oliver. I suppose you think a girl sits on a chair like a violet till a man says 'Will you be mine ? ' I don't know what you're laughing at. Caramel pudding ? I'm rather tired of it. I've got a new hat for Saturday, and next week I should like to have a few friends to tennis here. I suppose I can, Oliver ? You see I ask you and not your wife. Now when I marry, people will ask my permission and not my husband's. At least they will if I decide on the millionaire. I think he'd be quite twistable ; more so than Ambrose."

" Then I hope you won't marry him," said Christian.

XXII

CLARE was asking a few people to tennis every Saturday that summer. She said it amused John. Mr. Padstow did not play tennis and Clare was not much good at it. Besides there were only two courts at Highwood and as a rule about a dozen players, so an unselfish hostess hardly ever got a chance. Clare had explained this to Mr. Padstow when he first came to one of her little parties and she had taken him round the gardens and the greenhouses and lastly to the view of the creek and the Maniton woods. They sat down there and enjoyed the view for a long time, for Clare had not asked any elderly people whom she felt bound to entertain. The young ones entertained themselves either by playing tennis or looking at views. Besides John was always present and a most attentive host.

Mr. Padstow had only just come to Granfield. He had bought a large house, called Ashdown, that had been built by a rich Manchester man a few years ago and sold by his heir at his death. It was a house that talked of money and no one in the immediate neighbourhood would have had enough to keep it up. Besides no one would have wanted it. The grounds were large but bare, and the building itself was always described by the auctioneers as an edifice. They seemed to feel quite justly that house was not the right word for what had cost so much and made a fine display.

Wherever you drove or walked in the neighbourhood you seemed to see 'Ashdown' with its turrets and plate glass; for it was built on a little rise and not a tree had grown high enough yet to screen it. Everyone wondered what would happen to the place when the Manchester man died, and the news that a London financier had bought it and was coming to live in it gave general satisfaction; especially when it became known that he was unmarried and a millionaire. There was no such thing in the whole neighbourhood as a millionaire and some people regretted the advent of one. At the same time they agreed that 'Ashdown' was just the house for a person of that kind.

Clare had persuaded Major Loudon to call on Mr. Padstow directly he arrived. In the country you should be neighbourly, she said, and offer the stranger the hand of good-fellowship. It was for his sake partly that she inaugurated her tennis Saturdays, although he did not play tennis and was a good many years older than anyone else asked to them. He was always asked and he always attended. In the early spring, when tennis was impossible she had given one or two little lunch parties in his honour, but just before Oliver and Christian came back from Italy the weather had turned fine enough for games on the cinder court and the 'Saturdays' had started. Now it was June, and Clare wished they had never begun. She did not ask Jane every week, but she had to ask her sometimes. These social obligations are unavoidable. She tried asking her and not asking Mr. Padstow, but that did not work, because he came without an invitation and with an air of being sure of his welcome.

It was absurd; downright absurd. John said so

when she pointed out that Jane was setting her cap at the millionaire. Clare would not have minded it so much if the millionaire had shown more sense and put Jane in her place; but he did nothing of the kind. He admired her cap and enjoyed the set of it; if it was set. Mrs. Sam Bluett would have described the state of affairs differently. She told her husband that it was a case of love at first sight; on Mr. Padstow's part. Jane had appeared one afternoon and the thing was done. He had watched her playing tennis, and Jane playing tennis was a pleasant sight; he had listened to her young happy voice and he had observed to Mrs. Sam that the girl in grey had chic, and that in his opinion chic was more important than virtue or beauty. "A woman requires brains to be chic" he opined, and when the match was over got himself presented to Jane. The mischief was done. Clare saw her millionaire rapidly becoming Jane's millionaire, and could do nothing to stop it. She wondered what Oliver would say, but reflected cynically that men as a rule liked money.

Directly the Maniton party arrived at Highwood on Saturday Mr. Padstow came forward to greet Jane and was presented by her to her brother and his wife. This happened before they reached Clare, who was giving people tea in the drawing-room at the time and feeling annoyed because Mr. Padstow escaped by the window instead of staying near her. When he came back with the Hawkes she understood why he had done this and felt more annoyed than before. She was not attracted by Mr. Padstow as she had been attracted by Oliver a little while ago; but she valued his friendship and was sorry to see him in the toils of

Jane. This at least is what she said to herself as she poured out tea and tried to remember who took sugar and who did not. Oliver and Mr. Padstow both came up to her for cups just then and so she saw them next to each other and had thoughts about the differences between them. Oliver had breeding and Mr. Padstow had not. There was no doubt about that. The signs were intangible and indescribable, but they were there sure enough. Mr. Padstow was not ill-mannered ; he was not over-dressed ; he was not unschooled. He was the son of a monied man and had made more money himself, and in most matters made money his standard. That gave him great assurance especially amongst people who from his point of view were straightened in their means ; people who could not afford much ' glass ' in their gardens or several cars or expensive journeys ; people like the Loudons or the Favershams, for instance. Even the Hawkes, who were considered well off in that unsophisticated neighbourhood ; probably had less then five thousand a year. However, he rather liked being the wealthiest man in his surroundings and showing his neighbours that in spite of it he sought equality and friendship. In some cases he met with a slight want of responsiveness, but he was not at all thin-skinned. He meant shortly to give an entertainment that should gather in all those he wished to recognise, both the big fry and the small fry ; and he really had some idea of marrying Jane. So he was studiously polite to Oliver and Christian, who did not take to him much.

As an acquaintance they would have suffered him gladly. It was as a suitor for Jane that he gave them pause. The man was fifty, if he was a day, and though

he had a well preserved figure he was short and clumsy about the arms. His hair was grey, his cheeks were pink, his nose was nondescript and he had opaque blue eyes with heavy lids to them. If you had only passed him in the street you would have known that he had seen life and did himself well. Before he had sat beside Christian ten minutes, he was asking her advice about his prospective entertainment and explaining that he had not furnished his drawing-room yet because if ever he married, which was not impossible, his wife would wish to have a voice in its decorations herself.

"Don't you agree with me?" he said to Jane who was in the offing.

"I think I do," said Jane, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth but keeping an eye on Oliver, "In fact if ever I married, I should probably want everything new from garret to cellar."

"But what do you mean by new?" inquired Mr. Padstow rather anxiously. "As long as everything in a house is the best money can buy, and chosen with taste——"

"That's all I should ask," finished Jane. "Have you settled about your party yet, Mr. Padstow? Is it to be by day or by night? I hope it will be by night. I want to see the gardens lighted by Japanese lanterns and fairy lights—thousands of them—like Earl's Court."

"I hope it would not be at all like Earl's Court," said Mr. Padstow looking rather put out.

"Why not? I think Earl's Court is lovely. I was taken there once long ago when I was a child, and we went on the switchback and the Flip-Flap. I suppose you couldn't have a Flip-Flap in your garden?"

" No doubt I could ; but I don't think—— "

" It would be heavenly," cried Jane. " Clare, come here, darling. We are arranging about Mr. Padstow's party at Ashdown next month. He is going to have millions of Japanese lanterns and a Flip-Flap and an open air café like at Earl's Court. I'll be a waitress, will you ? "

" I thought it was to be a garden-party," said Clare who called people ' darling ' too easily and felt sure that Jane was mimicking her.

" It is ; a garden party by moonlight, and supper out of doors. You said so, didn't you, Mr. Padstow ? Or haven't you made up your mind ? "

" It sounds delightful," said Mr. Padstow, evidently as much attracted by Jane as a moth is by a lighted candle. " But in England a large entertainment that depends on weather is apt to be disappointing."

" Not if I'm going to it," said Jane. " I'm born lucky."

" I'm sure you are," said the infatuated man, and when Clare slid away he turned to Christian and asked her if she would waive ceremony and come to lunch next Sunday, when they could make further arrangements for his fête. Christian looked at Oliver and hardly knew what to say, so Mr. Padstow turned to him too and his invitation was accepted.

" How do you like my millionaire ? " asked Jane at dinner that night. " He is a very obliging man, isn't he ? I only have to hint at a thing and he carries it out. So different from you, Oliver."

" We both think you ought to be more careful, Jane," said Christian anxiously.

" I shall not take you with us on Sunday unless you

promise to behave yourself," said Oliver. " I won't have you telling the man how he is to give his parties. What business is it of yours ? "

" But he asked our advice ; didn't he, Christian ? "

" Yes, he did ; but perhaps you went rather too far in giving it. I don't think he really wants to build a Flip-Flap."

" I don't suppose he does ; but I want to have one."

She was looking at her brother's profile as she spoke and saw that he was really angry this time ; and she knew that he had some reason to be.

" All right," she said, " I won't say a word on Sunday even if I'm asked my opinion. I'll treat him as Christian treats you. Oh ! my Sam ! I couldn't. Don't you see I couldn't, dears ? We're different people. There is nothing romantic about my millionaire or about me either. I like the idea of his money and he likes—— "

" Stop it, Jane," cried Oliver and Jane stopped it ; but after dinner before her brother came into the drawing-room she said to Christian :

" Why was he so angry ? Doesn't he want me to be a millionairess ? "

" We both hate the idea," said Christian.

XXIII

FIRST they had lobster à l'Americaine; then enormous asparagus sent from Covent Garden; then duckling and green peas; and then strawberries and cream.

"I like a light simple luncheon," explained Mr. Padstow, "I hate a heavy meal in the middle of the day. Don't you?"

Oliver murmured something civil, Jane who so far had been on her best behaviour stifled a giggle, and Christian helped herself to coffee but refused Cointreau although Mr. Padstow assured her it was beneficial to the digestion. After lunch he began to do the honours of his house and grounds, both of which required time to mellow. He had only furnished part of the house which was a large one, with rows of bed-rooms on the upper floors and reception rooms of various kinds and sizes.

"It isn't a place for a bachelor," he pointed out. "It is essentially a family house. But I like room to move. I shouldn't feel at home in a pill-box."

He addressed many of his remarks to Jane, watched her as they went from room to room and accepted her suggestion about the drawing-room walls which he proposed to panel with crimson brocade. She said pale primrose would look better; so he said that primrose it should be. Although many of the rooms were still empty both upstairs and down, thousands of pounds

must have been spent inside the house already and the effect on Christian was to make her wish for a white-washed cottage. Every room, even the unfurnished ones had thick new carpets, and the sitting-rooms had costly curtains and cornices; there were pictures, statues, suits of armour and grandfather clocks where you would expect to see them, and there were some fine pieces of old Flemish inlaid furniture that Mr. Padstow said had cost a good deal but were cheap at the price.

"When a thing is worth having I don't mind what I give for it," he said, always with his eyes on Jane. "I bought a pearl necklace at Christie's the other day; a beauty. I'll show it you afterwards. Are you fond of jewellery, Miss Hawke?"

"I love beads," said Jane, "I've collected them for years. I have all colours and sizes. Some are wood or glass, some are berries and some are real—amber and lapis lazuli and amethyst, for instance. You can get lovely colours and shapes in beads, can't you?"

"I've never studied them," said Mr. Padstow. "I have some carved gold ones—old Italian—that I shall be delighted to add to your collection if you will accept them."

Somehow or other he managed it; Christian hardly knew how; but she found herself sitting sleepily on the verandah with Oliver, while her host disappeared with Jane in search of the beads. It was the hottest hour of a hot summer afternoon, the light lunch had made everyone sleepy, and, while Christian watched the steamer smoke on the horizon, Oliver shut his eyes and forgot to finish his cigar. But he was not asleep for presently he said in a drowsy voice:

"I wish I was a millionaire."

Christian, who had been rather sleepy too, waked up and said " Oliver ! " in a tone of pained remonstrance that was not enough to open her husband's eyes but had the effect of accenting the humorous lines about his mouth. But Christian was not in a humorous mood. She did not like what was going on and she wanted Oliver not to like it either.

" We have just broken his bread and eaten his salt," she murmured, " why did we come ? "

" Haven't you enjoyed your lunch ? I have. I wish we had one like it every day."

" You don't. You know you don't. You agree with me that there is something unpleasing about all this display of money."

" I don't care for the upholstery. I was thinking of the asparagus. Succulent ! That was the word. Asparagus is not worth eating unless it is large and succulent. He uses beautiful words."

" I don't want him to give Jane beads. He'll give her the pearls next, and then—— "

" After all it is Jane's affair," said Oliver, shading his eyes with his hand and looking at a fleet of fishing boats that was slowly putting out to sea. " I'm not going to interfere and you are not to either."

" I may show Jane that I am against it."

" No. Leave the young things alone. I won't have Jane's chances crabbed."

" I wish you'd be serious."

" I am. If Jane chooses to bring a millionaire into the family I'm the last man to stop her."

" I'd far rather she married Ambrose."

" That is nonsense," said Oliver ; and then Jane reappeared with her host. She wore a long chain of

carved golden beads and looked as smiling as a child who has just been given a new toy.

"I like being adored," she said on her way home. "Mr. Padstow says that I remind him of spring and make him feel young again. He gets quite soft and sentimental when we are by ourselves. So did Ambrose. Men are rather silly in that way, aren't they, Christian? I never feel in the least bowled over myself. It's all I can do not to laugh. You don't like him much, do you? But then you like Oliver who is quite different."

"Quite different," said Christian and made the brother and sister laugh by the emphasis of her tone. But she realised that her ideas were not their ideas in this matter and that theirs would prevail. For it was Oliver's house and if he chose to let Mr. Padstow come in and out of it in an intimate way she could do nothing to prevent it. She had been married more than four months now and she was a happy wife, but not one who ever faced her husband when they were at odds. She knew herself well enough to know that some day the tussle would come and have to be fought out; but as yet she had never braced herself to it. He lorded it over her as if she were a child; with good humour and kindness; and rather than anger him she invariably gave in to his decrees. He had his own way about the housekeeping, and gave his orders in the garden; she went here and there as he bid her, wore what pleased him, saw the people he approved, submitted her accounts to him, was at his beck and call; and by night and day she was absurdly, dreamily happy. But hitherto any clash between them had been solved by her submission. If she wanted what

he did not want she gave in. She was so much in love that these little renunciations no more troubled her than a pin-prick troubles a fakir's ecstasy ; besides she valued every sign of his attachment to her and his autocratic ways were a sign. She was his property, his woman, and his domination was a matter of course, like breathing, a state of things ordained by Nature. By slow degrees he was discovering that he could trust her discretion and even sometimes her judgment ; but he still thought of her as a child fifteen years younger than himself, inexperienced and ignorant of life. So she was ; but she knew that she was growing up faster than he understood ; and that sooner or later he would have to give her more rein. He still coupled her with Jane, and there were occasions when this did not please her ; especially in one instance when he made arrangements for them both without consulting her.

" I'm obliged to be up in London next week," he said one evening after dinner.

" We'll both come with you," said Jane.

" No, you won't. I couldn't look after you. I shall be busy."

" We can look after ourselves ; can't we, Christian ?"

" I'm afraid Oliver doesn't think so," said Christian.

He looked at his wife, a little, a very little disturbed by her tone. It was not quite as dove-like as a wife's tone should be. In fact it was ironical ; not sharp or angry but ironical ; as if his attitude amused her ; and a man does not want to amuse his wife by his thought for her welfare.

" I've arranged for you both to go to Highwood for a week," he said. " John suggested it when I told

him I had to go away. I thought it was a good idea."

" I call it a rotten one," said Jane.

" So do I," said Christian ; and Oliver saw that she was indignant ; but he was annoyed too, because he did not want to leave them by themselves and he knew that Miss Millet was occupied ; so he had felt relieved when good old John had proposed to have them at Highwood and keep an eye on them. Not that Christian needed an eye. John and he were agreed on that. But Jane did ; especially just now when that Padstow fellow was so much in evidence. Oliver did not want his sister to be talked about, and he would go away comfortably if both the girls were with John. Of course being with John meant being with Clare, but that could not be helped. John and he had fixed it up yesterday when they met in Granfield and Oliver had not expected to meet with opposition from his wife.

" I don't think I shall be away more than a week," he said to Christian.

" Why can't we stay here ? " asked Jane.

" Because I've decided that you are to go to Highwood," he said curtly. He was not going to stand any nonsense from Jane and he did not mind Christian knowing it ; because he was not going to stand any nonsense from her either ; although, of course, since she was his wife he would use a more persuasive and considerate tone with her. He wished she would join in the argument so that he could address himself to her and explain that he had accepted John's invitation as it was given, on the spur of the moment and without realizing that perhaps he ought to have talked it over with her first. But she had a bit of embroidery in her hands and kept her eyes on it. Jane, of course, talked

for both of them and said amongst other things that she detested Clare and would not stay in her house.

" It's John's house," said Oliver. " You will be his guests and as you are both fond of him—— "

" We'll go if you'll take Clare to London," said Jane.

" You'll go in any case," said Oliver. By this time he and Jane were too angry to consider what they were saying or how it sounded in Christian's ears.

" Have you found out whether Clare wants us ? " Christian asked.

" No," said Oliver. " That's John's business. He thought it was all right."

" Besides, who is Clare ? " mocked Jane. " It's John's house ! "

" Oh ! Damn ! " said Oliver and stalked out of the room.

XXIV

AFTER dinner it was Oliver's habit to sit with his wife and sister for about an hour and then go to his own room to write business letters; for all day long he was out and about on his land looking after things. Maniton was one of those properties that keep a man busy from morning till night but hardly need an agent as well as an owner; and just now he was extra busy because he had found most of the cottages in bad order and was either putting them to rights or building new ones. He did not expect this to be a paying job but he took a keen interest in it and so did Christian as far as he allowed her to. His room was littered with builders' and ironmongers' catalogues at present and his visit to London had drains and kitchen ranges as its chief object. He took as much interest now in subsoils as he used to take in rubber; for it was his way to concentrate on the work under his hand and do it with all his might. He sat down to his evening post with a sense of relief; for here were matters he could understand and control. Women were unaccountable and at times provoking. Either they were openly rebellious, like Jane; or they turned silent and looked put out, like Christian. He opened a letter he had been expecting about window-fasteners. How satisfactory business transactions were and even disputes over inanimate

things. He had tried to get the window-fasteners at a slightly reduced rate and the manufacturers wrote agreeing to his offer. No personal feelings were involved. No one was aggrieved. He wished all the affairs of life were as simple to manage as window-fasteners.

" May I come in ? " said Clare and without waiting for his permission stepped into the room through the French window which had been left open.

She threw off an evening wrap directly she crossed the threshold and he saw that she had on one of those frocks that left the whole of her shoulders and most of her back bare to an admiring world. When she had got rid of the wrap she came close to him and as he pushed back his chair to receive her, prevented him from getting up by sitting on his knee, putting her arm round his neck and kissing him.

" What the mischief are you up to, Clare ? " he said ungallantly ; for he did not want her on his knee.

" Don't look so fierce," she said laughing. " We are brother and sister now."

" We are not."

" Of course we are. Don't you let Jane kiss you ? "

" We peck at each other politely. I don't call it kissing. Get up, Clare. Suppose anyone came in ! "

She kissed him again.

" It seems quite natural to me," she said. " I rather like being your sister, Oliver. It is such a simple, sane relationship, with no sentiment about it. But I don't want particularly to be a sister to Jane. She has never understood me. Why are you sending her to stay at Highwood ; and Christian too ? I don't suppose they want to come."

" John and I fixed it up together yesterday," said Oliver. " It's only for a week."

" I came to see Christian about it. I rowed myself across but I didn't like doing it. You'll have to row me back, Oliver ; will you ? "

" Certainly," said Oliver, his joy over the window-fasteners evaporated ; and his hope of getting through his correspondence at a reasonable hour fading fast too. Not that he exactly disliked Clare or found it unpleasant to have her on his knee. But if she was going to behave in this way there would be complications, and he did not want any. He wanted to lead a quiet life, giving his affections to Christian and his working hours to subsoils and window-fasteners.

" Christian is always in the drawing-room after dinner," he said. " Shall we—— "

" No, we shan't—not just yet," teased Clare. " Are you going to grudge me a minute, darling ? I may call you darling, now I'm your sister ! I know Christian is in the drawing-room. She is always where she ought to be. She wouldn't steal out in the dark and sit on a man's knee and kiss him, would she ? "

" She would not," said Oliver.

At that minute Christian came into the room. As the door opened Clare just had time to spring to her feet but not time to get as far away from Oliver as ordinary decorum prescribed. Besides Christian heard the sound of her step-sister's sudden movement and found her so close to her husband that she could guess more or less what had taken place.

" I have come to see you, darling," said Clare.

It looked like it, thought Christian, and Oliver noted the ironical light in his wife's eyes as she accepted

Clare's statement without comment. He noted too that she did not apologise for disturbing him in his work-room or propose to take Clare out of it. He wondered why she had come, but he supposed it was because she wanted to speak to him about this visit to Highwood. He half wished he had never arranged it ; but it had seemed an excellent plan yesterday. How could he foresee that the three women affected by it would all jib ? And how much easier it was to build cottages than to govern women. He supposed that nowadays women did not wish to be governed by their men-folk, but what was the individual man to do when the two intimately in his keeping were still in their teens and when one had led the life of a nun and the other was unusually lively and inclined to mischief. John had seen at once that it was not advisable to leave them by themselves, and Oliver had hoped that Christian would see it too. She had not looked at him since she came into the room ; nor was she looking at Clare who was perched on the edge of the table and smoking a cigarette.

" You and Jane must bring some clothes with you next week," Clare was saying. " I'm looking forward to having you so much. We will do all sorts of things together that I don't do when I'm alone. What about the car ? Is Oliver taking it to London or can you have it ? "

" I'm not taking it to London," said Oliver. " It will be there for you all to use."

" Who brought you across ? " asked Christian, looking at her step-sister. " Is anyone waiting in the boat ? "

" No. I brought myself with a lantern. But I

didn't like it, so Oliver is going to take me back ; won't you, Oliver ? "

" Certainly," said Oliver ; and soon after that Clare got up to go. It took nearly an hour to accompany her to her front door and bring himself back and he hoped to find that Christian had gone to bed and to sleep like a sensible woman. He wished to write his letters and make up his mind about various matters the builder would want to know next day ; and before he made up his mind there were Price Lists to consult, and Price Lists when they are many and voluminous take time.

But Christian had not behaved like a sensible woman and the sight of her sitting there and waiting for him almost persuaded Oliver that the two terms were incompatible.

" Why are you not in bed ? " he said in the annoyed voice of a man who justly thinks there is a season for all things and that the one for Price Lists is not the one for matrimonial argument. Unfortunately, however, Christian had forgotten the existence of Price Lists and had her mind full of Clare. She did not suppose for a moment that Oliver was returning to Clare. She was not jealous in the ordinary sense of the word ; but she did believe that Clare wanted to carry on one of her brazen flirtations, and that the man hardly lived who cared to resist her. She was sure that Clare had been on Oliver's knee when she came in suddenly and she had seen her husband turn red although her step-sister did not. It was uncomfortable to say the least, and Christian more than ever hated the thought of being Clare's guest next week.

" I stayed up because I wanted to speak to you,"

she said and since she had been fretting and not speaking, her voice, against her will, sounded stiff and chilly.

"Won't it wait for to-morrow?" said Oliver looking at the Price Lists. "I've letters to write."

"I don't want to go to Highwood, Oliver."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to."

Oliver was just as much in love with Christian as she was with him. His marriage vows expressed his sentiments so adequately and completely that as he was being married he thought the service was a tribute to the wisdom of the men who had composed it. He worshipped his bride with his body, he was delighted to endow her with his worldly goods and he was of a mind to love and cherish her till death parted them. But even a bride and wife is a woman and women have some exasperating ways; the most exasperating being the one of repetition. Instead of answering his question plainly and giving him a reason for wishing to upset his excellent plan, here was Christian looking more miserable than he had ever seen her and reiterating like a parrot, that she did not want to go to Highwood.

"It's only for a week," he said impatiently. "You were living there till you were married and you were all right. John is one of the best fellows there is."

"I can see no reason why Jane and I should not stay here."

Oliver turned to his Price Lists again and that together with the hardening of his jaw told her that as far as he was concerned the discussion was ended. She looked at him meditatively. Some day she meant to ask him whether Clare had ever paid him an after

dinner visit before and whether she usually sat on his knee, but she could not do so now and risk his anger. He had not been in the least embarrassed or apologetic and indeed she hardly expected that, for she knew with her whole being that he loved her and did not love Clare. There should be no silly scenes of jealousy between them. Besides they had to live in amicable relations with Clare chiefly for John's sake. But Christian did not want to stay in her house, and Jane did not want it either, and assuredly Clare did not want them. Their reasons were as complex and well founded as their mutual distrust ; a growth of years not to be put into crisp words at a man's bidding. However Christian understood that it was useless to say anything more. Oliver was not a man whose orders could be disobeyed. To attempt it would somehow end in failure and would make real trouble between them. The occasion was not worth it even if she could have plucked up the courage ; which, she knew in his presence, she could not. It had been easy enough to come here with bold intentions, egged on by Jane ; but they collapsed the moment he hardened as he had done just now. She could not fight him, partly because her defeat would be a foregone conclusion and partly because a man who loves his wife does not want brawls with her. He wants peace and right supremacy, as she had told him once. At least a man like Oliver does, and in spite of the times Christian believed that there were many men like him. She was young but shrewd.

So when Oliver turned to his Price Lists and set his jaw she got up, and just touched his hair as she passed him ; and went to bed. Oliver felt her touch and

would have responded, but she had gone as he turned in his chair ; it left a little glow within him and an extra tenderness. She was a woman but she was a darling. Some women would have asked questions about Clare and been tiresome. It was Clare who was tiresome and perhaps it would have been wiser not to send the two girls to stay there. But they were such children to leave alone and Jane was a madcap. He would bring Christian an emerald ring from London. He knew she admired one of Clare's.

Maniton,
Granfield,
July 2nd, 1914.

To Messrs. Linkie & Jones.

Please send two dozen window fasteners at price quoted in your letter of June 18th.

Yours faithfully,
Oliver Hawke.

XXV

CHRISTIAN'S bedroom at Ashdown had a rose-coloured Axminster carpet, curtains of rose brocade, chairs upholstered with rose brocade, a suite of Italian inlaid furniture and an ormolu clock on the mantelpiece that kept her awake till she stopped the pendulum. There was nothing old or shabby in Mr. Padstow's house and nothing cheap. He did not like cretonne, for instance, because it was cheap ; and he had told the firm furnishing for him that the first floor bedrooms were all to have silk or brocade. A little while ago he had been attracted by two Japanese vases in a second-hand shop where he sometimes picked up things. But they were cheap so he left them in the shop.

" I'm like that," he had said expansively to Clare. " I can't help it. I hate anything common."

" I'm like that too," murmured Clare, " it means that we have fine susceptibilities."

" Does it ? " said Mr. Padstow purring. " I'm glad of that."

He had quite easily persuaded Clare to spend most of the week of Oliver's absence at Ashdown and to bring her guests with her. It had been arranged on the Saturday and though the Maniton folk were in the Highwood garden, Clare had not said a word about it or allowed Mr. Padstow to say anything. She told

him that Oliver was a queer tempered man who might forbid his wife and sister to go ; and Mr. Padstow agreed with her that Oliver was not easy-going. So it was not till Christian and Jane arrived at Highwood on Tuesday evening that they heard of the pleasure in store for them. They were all to go to Ashdown next day in the Maniton car and spend a couple of nights there. Even John had not been told that the invitation was for five nights and that Clare did not mean to bring her party back till Monday. The extension of their visit must be managed day by day with an air of impromptu so that Oliver could not write to Christian and veto it. Clare had thought it all out.

Her motives for wanting to pay the visit were various and trifling. When she was first told that Christian and Jane were asked to stay at Highwood she had shown annoyance, until it struck her that she might get the use of Oliver's car for the week ; and then she said that of course as dear John had made the arrangement she would do her best to carry it out, although she thought he might have remembered that some of the maids were having holidays. But when Mr. Padstow heard that the two girls were coming, and suggested a little visit to Ashdown she fell in with the idea at once although she had no wish to see Jane become Mrs. Padstow. She did not wish it, and she did not think it likely, and when she was on the spot she might see chances of preventing it. You never knew ; but you could keep your eyes open and your ears cocked. The maids really were having their holidays and every housekeeper knows what a relief it is to get out of the house when it is under-staffed ; especially when two undesired guests have been added to the other in-

conveniences. Besides Clare had never stayed at Ashdown and she was sure she would enjoy it. Her room was upholstered with flowered brocade and had a Persian carpet in which pinks prevailed. The large windows faced the sea, bowls of roses scented the air, and though it was summer a small wood fire burned pleasantly on the hearth. The bath-room next door was paved with coloured marbles and walled with tiles. The soaps and bath salts were all Atkinson's and when her maid prepared her bath before dinner she put in so much salts that John said the stink of them came through the keyhole and annoyed him while he was dressing. For John had not wanted to come and was inclined to be a little out of humour. He said that he was more comfortable at home, that he didn't care for Padstow and that he wasn't at all sure that Oliver would wish his wife and sister to be staying here. Clare, however, was used to dear John being a little tiresome at times, and the house was so large and airy that she envisaged the idea of a 'chill.' If John had a chill and took to his bed for a day or two she would easily persuade him that the visit must be prolonged; but it must be a very slight chill that did not keep a devoted wife at his bedside.

"These new houses are not as warm as Highwood, are they?" she said. "I suppose in winter there is central heating, but the sea-mist is coming in to-night. Perhaps you ought to shut your windows, John."

"I can't," growled John. "I should be poisoned by the reek of that beastly stuff you use in your bath."

Clare left it at that because she was not sure yet whether she wanted John to have a chill, and when she went down to dinner she made up her mind at once

that she did not. For she found that another guest had arrived and was spending a few days with Mr. Padstow, and that he made their numbers even, as the numbers of a small intimate house-party should be. He was a Mr. Cockshott, a young solicitor from Granfield, who was only known to the Hawkes and Loudons by sight, and by Miss Millet's allusions to him. For he was distantly connected with her and she had given Jane to understand that he was 'rather wild.' He did not look it, but Jane said to herself hopefully that appearances are deceptive, and she was exchanging badinage with him when Clare entered the room. He was a fresh faced, rather undersized person with a freckled skin and fair hair that, to his intense annoyance, curled when not severely treated. He had recently come back to his uncle's firm in Granfield after three years in London and the change was not agreeable to him. Granfield, he said, was dull and so were the people in it. They were also hide bound and Victorian. In Granfield you could not live your life or even state your views freely as a twencenter should. "We twencenters" was a phrase often on his lips; and when Clare came into the room he had just given Jane to understand that he did not expect to stay in Granfield for ever. He said that in London he had lodged in Chelsea and that after the studios of Chelsea the drawing-rooms of Granfield felt like prisons. He had achieved the entry of the studios through a cousin with whom he had shared digs, and who was a painter and a Red. All the cousin's friends were 'advanced.'

"I feel like a fish out of water here," he confided to Jane. "I'm inclined to be advanced myself."

"So am I," said Jane.

"I thought you looked like it," said Mr. Cockshott. "Would you destroy everything?"

"Most things," said Jane thinking of the drawing-room paper at Maniton, "I'd like to tear things down with my own hands and put up something new with less pattern."

"Just so," said Mr. Cockshott. "Patterns are banal."

Then he looked up suddenly and saw Clare and he was as dazzled by her as if he had been an ordinary young man whose friends and views were not advanced. He had often seen her in Granfield before he went to London, but he had never met her on an equal footing before or seen her in evening dress. Mr. Padstow introduced him and then said that as they were a small party and were dining at a round table they would go in anyhow and sit as they pleased. It pleased him to sit next to Jane and to devote himself to her although the brilliant Clare was on his other side; so Mr. Cockshott became a man of the world and prattled to Clare as if there was no such thing as a Red. He was a voluble talker and revealed himself, at any rate to Christian, both by his talk and by his attention to the food and wine. She did not like him much although she would have admitted that he might improve as he grew older. But she was not old enough herself yet to make allowances for youth and she thought him moderately clever and immoderately conceited, and a man who would be greedy in middle age. His appreciation of the cooking and the wines might please Mr. Padstow but did not please her. She was in a critical mood perhaps for she was uneasy at having been whisked here on a surprise visit without Oliver's

knowledge. She had known nothing about it till they arrived at Highwood yesterday and John had spoken of it at dinner. Clare had airily explained that it was an impromptu idea but convenient on account of the maids' holidays, and Jane had said that she liked it because it would jolly well score off Oliver. She did not say how.

But it was just this note in the situation that troubled Christian. She felt uncertain how Oliver would take it and whether he would blame her for coming. She was not even certain what he would say if Mr. Padstow proposed to Jane and was accepted, for she had never got him to take the matter seriously. He never would see as Christian did that Mr. Padstow was in earnest and that Jane ought to be headed off. Christian looked at her host to-night as he wooed Jane and wondered how Jane could bear it. All the evening he wooed her openly while Mr. Cockshott laid siege to Clare and Christian played the piano to John who closed his eyes but said he enjoyed the music. Christian enjoyed it because the piano was the largest and best Bechstein money could buy; but she did not enjoy seeing Mr. Padstow disappear with Jane and stay away for nearly an hour. When they came back they said they had been discussing the entertainment Mr. Padstow thought of giving at the end of the month and had decided on August 1st for its date.

"By that time many things may happen," said Mr. Padstow.

XXVI

" I ADORE money," said Jane.

She was brushing her hair by invitation in Christian's room at Ashdown and she looked about fifteen. She was in high spirits because she had a secret : a secret with Mr. Padstow. She would not say what it was, but she intimated that if it came off everyone would be delighted ; and that it would cost large sums of money.

" When the girls talked sobstuff at school I always told them I meant to marry a millionaire," she went on. " They used to call me a mercenary little beast but I didn't mind."

" I hope you won't do it."

" I suppose you'd have married Oliver on twopence a year and scrubbed his floors for him and blacked his boots."

" I should have let him black his own boots."

" You wouldn't. I don't want to marry anyone but I want money. Think of the things I could do. I'd re-paper your drawing-room."

" What a goose you are, Jane," said Christian laughing. " I could do that myself for twenty pounds if Oliver would allow it."

"The truth is that I belong to my generation and you belong to the last but one," said Jane. "You're a chattel."

"I'm not. Anyhow I'm happy and that is more than you will be if you marry the wrong man, money or no money. There is more than a year between us, Jane. There is the whole difference——"

"Speak out," said Jane. "We twencenters don't walk in blinkers as your kind did. You mean I might like sharing a man's banking account but not his bed and his board."

Christian coloured, nodded and went on brushing her hair, but presently she spoke.

"Conceit and immaturity are not peculiar to your generation," she said, "they probably manifested themselves in the ark. The fashion changes but not the qualities that produce the fashion."

"You speak like a book."

"I was thinking of Mr. Cockshott. In one way he's like Clare. They both want to be the *dernier cri*, he in opinions and she in skirts."

As she finished speaking Clare strolled into the room with her hair-brush, looked annoyed when she saw Jane, yawned, sat down and said she wondered how they were going to get through the next few days. Mr. Cockshott bored her. He talked too much about Russians.

"What would you like to do?" said Jane with an irritating proprietary air that Christian guessed was connected with the secret. But Clare had not been told of the secret, and she lifted her eyebrows at Jane with an air of rebuke.

"I should like to run up to London to-morrow and

cross to Paris the next day," she said in the tone of one who expresses a wish to get to the moon but knows it is impracticable.

"Paris!" said Jane meditatively. "I hadn't thought of Paris!" and then as if she knew she had said too much and could not trust herself not to say more she bid good-night in a twinkling and was out of the room.

Clare stayed on for some time and when at last she departed Christian went to bed but found that she could not sleep. There were summer lights in the sky and from her wide open windows she could see lights on the sea. The owls were calling to each other close by; it was a night of stars, and the fresh scents of the garden were stronger and sweeter than the scent of the flowers in her room. But she felt uneasy and uncertain; uneasy about Jane and uncertain what Oliver's view would be of their visit here. It could not be helped; but Christian hoped that he would not be angry about it. Perhaps he would think that she ought to have used her discretion and gone back to Maniton instead of allowing Jane and herself to be whisked here by Clare. She had thought of it and had not done it because he had definitely told them that they were to be with Clare and not at Maniton. He ought to have known that Clare was undependable and restless and that what he settled with the solid John might be upset like a house of cards by John's wife; but men did not know these things about women. Oliver seemed to take for granted that John, like himself, was master in his own home; but they were different men and their wives were different too. Jane had told Christian she was a chattel and was inclined to laugh at her subservience to Oliver; and

Clare had spoken in the same strain that very night. She had come with some of her perennial tales about unpaid bills and an empty exchequer and had hinted broadly at what she called a loan ; and Christian who detested hints and debts had said bluntly that she could not lend money because Oliver had forbidden it. It was an uncomfortable thing to do, especially at a time when she was nominally Clare's guest ; but it had to be done.

" You don't mean to say you can't do what you please with your own money ? " Clare had exclaimed and she had scoffed at Christian and called her an anachronism. That was what Christian was thinking of as she leaned far out of her window to meet the scent of a sweetbriar hedge beneath it and to watch the moving lights on the sea. She did not want to be an anachronism, out of harmony with her own times and in a sense a blackleg amongst women. But what is a girl to do when she marries a man fifteen years older than herself, thinks all the world of him and would rather submit to him than fight him ? After considering the question for some time and allowing the peace and freshness of the night to compose her, Christian decided that there were worse troubles in the world than her own, and that if she were happy under Oliver's heel she might as well stay there ; at any rate for the present. What made her unhappy was his absence. She felt lonely and incomplete without him.

This uneasiness was increased by the publication of Jane's secret at breakfast next day.

" Tell them now," she said to Mr. Padstow directly Clare appeared ; and Mr. Padstow told them. He proposed, he said, to take them up to London to-day

in the Rolls-Royce and the small Daimler to spend two days at Jules, getting in three theatres and possibly the Zoo on Sunday morning and to return either on Sunday after lunch or on Monday after breakfast. He looked a little embarrassed when he mentioned the three theatres and the Zoo, but Jane's eye was on him and he pretended not to see that Clare raised her eyebrows at his programme, that Major Loudon was going to hum and haw over it and that Christian was startled and unwilling.

"I have an important meeting on Saturday," said Major Loudon, "I'm afraid I must get home."

"What is the meeting about?" asked Jane.

"Drains," said Major Loudon. He hated London, was bored by theatres and did not care for motoring; drains were interesting sensible things and his duty as a citizen was to attend to them; but a man's duties are apt to be divided. He could not let the three young women officially in his care go to London without him and he could not prevent them from going if they were set on it. He was not that kind of man.

Therefore in spite of the drains requiring his advice and experience, he was ready at the appointed hour and took his seat in the Rolls-Royce with Clare and Christian and Mr. Cockshott who had managed to get leave from the office by persuading his uncle that a bit of business he had in hand would be more promptly done if he paid a personal visit to a firm in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Mr. Padstow went in the small car with Jane; an arrangement that did not please either Clare or Christian but which they had not been able to prevent because at Jane's suggestion the small car had started first.

"It will be quite proper if we take Price with us," she pointed out to her elderly friend. "She can sit in front with her feet on Clare's dressing-case."

Mr. Padstow was putty in Jane's hands and liked it. It is not easy to combine the parts of fatherly friend and ardent admirer, but he hoped that he was doing it pretty well. Jane's speed and recklessness took his breath away, but when you have passed fifty is it not agreeable to tread a measure to youth's tune and time if youth invites you? He, at any rate, was willing to pay the piper and dance after Jane. She amused and enchanted him; and when the hour seemed ripe he meant to propose marriage to her. He delayed doing so because all his ideas were orthodox and he thought that a proposal of marriage should be made to soft music. So far, however, Jane had successfully avoided anything of the kind. He could not even feel sure that she would marry him if he asked her, and he did not want to be refused. Mr. Padstow was susceptible to ridicule and a little anxious about being the husband of such an absurdly young wife; but it would be worse to have it known that he had wished to be the husband and had been refused. He knew that his money would tempt many women, even young charming ones; but he was not sure yet that it was going to tempt Jane. She was so candid about liking to spend it for him that he doubted her acceptance of it for life.

"We won't let them overtake us," she said as they skimmed the hot country roads. "We needn't stop anywhere for meals, need we? and they are sure to. John will want lunch."

"So shall we," said Mr. Padstow.

" I've brought a whole pound of macaroons and a bottle of cider. I asked Price to get them this morning. You don't mind, do you ? "

" I don't mind you're bringing them but I don't call them lunch. If I had known you wanted to outstrip the others I'd have had a hamper packed."

" Don't you like macaroons and cider ? "

" Not much."

" Very well then ; we'll stop at Oxstead. It's a big town and they won't know which hotel we've gone to if we choose a second rate one. They'll expect to find us at the best."

" But why are you so anxious to be ahead of them ? "

" It's more fun. If we do go to a hotel they won't know whether we are father and daughter or honeymooners. Perhaps I had better call you uncle."

" Why should you ? "

" Well—I must call you something. We don't want strangers to know we have run away together, do we ? "

" My name is George," said Mr. Padstow rather tremulously.

" I know. The same as my puppy. I might call you Uncle George—just for the day."

" No, don't," pleaded Mr. Padstow. " I've no wish to be your uncle. Let people think that we are honeymooners."

" I haven't a ring."

" We could get one."

" It wouldn't make me married to you, would it ? "

" N—o—, but—— "

" All right then ; and when the others come we'll

pretend we got married on the way—just for five minutes or so to tease them. We had better go to a good hotel for lunch then. You'll like it and I don't mind being caught if I can tell Clare I'm a happy bride. Do you think she'll believe it ? "

" Probably not—but——"

" How fond you are of ' buts,' " said Jane. " I think I'll have a macaroon now as we needn't save them for lunch. I hope they are sticky ones."

XXVII

THE curtain went up on the first scene of 'Kismet.' Oliver, a little late for once, slipped into his stall and without looking round the house fixed his attention on the stage. It was Friday evening and he was alone. On other evenings he had been with friends, but to-night a man had failed him at the last moment. So he had dined by himself at his club and by good luck found a returned seat at his disposal when he got to the theatre. Yesterday he had received a letter from Christian telling him that they were all going to Ashdown for two nights; and he had answered it to Highwood where he expected her to be this evening, probably playing chess with John. Or perhaps the four of them were sitting down to bridge and conversation; for with Clare and Jane at a card-table you never got the game only. He had not been over pleased to hear of the visit to Ashdown and wondered how it had come about. When a man leaves a young wife and sister safely at one house he hardly expects to hear they have gone gallivanting to another; but no doubt Clare and Jane had hatched the plan between them. Those two were

always in mischief. He would be glad when Jane married, but he did not want her to marry an underbred elderly man for his money ; nor would he consent to her marrying a young man with no money and no prospects. What a good opening scene this was with the beggar at the foot of the mosque asking alms of the passers by. He watched the play with pleasure and attention, wishing that Christian who loved a play was beside him. Next time he came to London he would bring her and take her to the theatre every night. She had wanted to come this time and had not wanted to go to Highwood. He would buy her that ring he had seen in Bond Street yesterday and the biggest box of chocolates he could get ; but he believed she would rather have books than a new ring. She did not care for jewellery much. At least she never seemed to covet it. Now the first act was at an end and the lights went up and he could have a look at the house. People were moving about. He himself rose and turned round, his Zeiss glasses in his hand. But he did not need them. The moment he turned he saw his wife with Clare and Jane in a box on the first tier. The men behind them were in shadow, but he made out that John was one of them. So far so good. But who were the others ? He found his way up to the box and went in.

" It was a sudden idea," said Mr. Padstow.

" Mine," said Jane. " This is the third theatre since last night and to-morrow we are going to the Zoo. Everyone but me was blinking with sleep after dinner and would have gone to bed if I had let them. You see we did two hundred miles yesterday and the Hippodrome afterwards ; and all this morning we tore round

shops. This afternoon we saw ' Mr. Wu.' John didn't like it. I saw you when you came in, Oliver."

" So did I," said Christian.

" How surprised you must have been when you saw us," said Clare.

" I never saw a man more surprised," said Mr. Cockshott, who in striving after an easy manner was apt to be rather free and easy.

" We go back on Monday," said John and his manner was apologetic.

" Come with us," said Mr. Padstow.

" Oh ! do," said Christian her eyes seeking her husband's. He hesitated. There was no reason why he should not go home with them. His business was done and his engagements for Monday were not important. They could be given up. His wife's eyes met his again and were irresistible. She was glad to see him, so glad that she was trying hard to keep a rein on herself and not show it absurdly. He was just as glad to see her. They were still lovers.

" Will you all come to supper afterwards at the Carlton," he said ; and Jane accepted for everyone with a crow of delight.

" You're a sport," she whispered to her brother. " Some men would have been stuffy. I expect you did say Damn to yourself when you saw us ! "

" Did you saw Damn when you saw us ? " asked Christian next day at the Zoo when they had managed to get away together and were sitting in the shade near the seal pond waiting for the seals to be fed. The supper the night before had been outwardly festive and harmonious, but the husband and wife had had no chance of talking to each other. Christian thought

that Oliver had avoided little chances he might have taken and she had not slept well because the thought that she was not at peace with him fretted her. So when they met at the Zoo this morning she took possession of him at once and led him away.

"I want to talk to you," she had said. "Let the others sort themselves."

"I want to know what is happening," he answered when she asked him if he had said Damn.

"I think that any minute Mr. Padstow may propose to Jane."

"Yes. His intentions are plain even to me; but hers are not."

"She says she adores money."

"Well—if she can stand him——"

"But I can't; not as a husband to Jane."

Oliver only laughed. He would not take it as seriously as she did. He would not promise to use his authority and forbid any engagement. He talked nonsense about not wishing to play the heavy father and disturb love's young dream. He made love to Christian and once when no one was in sight for a moment stooped suddenly and kissed her. He told her that if she had obeyed him and remained at Highwood the present situation would not have arisen; and when she asked him how she could have stayed he quoted the boy on the burning deck at her and said that nowadays all women were rebels.

"You know I'm not," cried Christian, her colour rising and her temper flaming unexpectedly. "I'm glad we came," she went on defiantly, "I've seen three plays and bought a new frock for the Fête at Ashdown; and we're having this morning here together; and I've

bought frocks for Clare and Jane for the Fête because they had no money—— "

"The devil you have," exclaimed Oliver. "I thought I told you—— "

"Yes ; you did. But I couldn't buy a new frock for myself and let them wear old ones. It's a special occasion. I meant to get your permission and then tell you I'd done it. Anyhow I have done it and it can't be undone, and if you had left Jane and me at Maniton none of these things would have happened."

Oliver was so taken by surprise that he stared at his wife without speaking for a moment. Rank mutiny by the mass and the mutineer his dove who never disputed his commands or showed a temper that was ruffled. It was with a sense of relief that he saw Jane coming towards them with Mr. Padstow. Sooner or later he must carry on the argument with Christian and inform her once for all that he would not have her substance wasted on Clare and Jane, but he did not want to do it at the moment in a public place. So he felt pleased to see Jane until he gathered from the triumph in her face and the embarrassment in Mr. Padstow that here also things were happening that had better not have happened. For really, when you saw these two people in juxtaposition the idea of nuptials between them was impossible. At least it was to Oliver ; but Jane made it clear at once that she and her elderly admirer thought otherwise.

"I've got some good news for you," she said to her brother. "You know you're longing to get me off your hands though you wouldn't let me marry Wiggles because he hasn't a bean. Poor Wiggles ! How sick he'll be, I wonder if I ought to ask him to the wedding.

Better not perhaps. Let him see it in the Times. Jane Elizabeth Hawke to George—— Have you any other name, George? I must call you something else to distinguish you from the puppy. It's rather late in the day to give him a new name. *He* always wags his tail when I say George. You don't look as waggish as you should considering that you've just proposed and been accepted."

"I want to speak to your brother," said Mr. Padstow. "Do be serious, Jane, for once."

"He's very much annoyed with me for telling you at all," continued Jane, "he wanted a secret engagement—— "

"Only until I could have a quiet talk in suitable surroundings," explained Mr. Padstow hurriedly.

"I don't see what the surroundings have to do with it. Oliver didn't like Wiggles because he was poor; so I've gone to the other extreme. You are rich, aren't you? I shouldn't like to make a mistake."

"Jane!" said Oliver angrily.

"But I've told him I'm marrying for money. He doesn't mind; do you? We are both commonplace practical people with no nonsense about us. He proposed to me in the elephant house and the smallest elephant was watching us all the time out of his wicked eyes. We shall have to come here every year, George, and give him bags of buns; or you might buy him. I'd like a tame elephant."

A movement in the crowd round the Sea Lions' cage saved the situation for the moment. Christian and Jane hurried forward to see the seals fed, leaving the two men together.

" I'm afraid you don't like the idea much," said Mr. Padstow sitting down next to Oliver.

" I'm afraid I don't," admitted Oliver.

" Of course there is disparity ; a certain disparity in age ; but I'm a healthy man for my years and well preserved. Such marriages frequently take place and are as successful as more romantic ones. Besides on my side . . . I'm greatly attracted by your sister . . . such vivacity . . . such enterprise . . . when I'm with her I feel as young as she is. I can make her a rich woman."

" I know you can," said Oliver getting up. " I must think it over. Shall we go and see the seals fed ? "

Mr. Padstow did not look best pleased. After all he was the monied man offering to marry a girl with next to no money. What did a few years between them matter compared with the solid benefits he was ready to confer on Jane ?

" You disapprove of the marriage," he suggested again in a tone indicative of his wounded feelings.

" I think she is too much of a child to take such a step without consideration," said Oliver in a more friendly way. " You would regret it too if she was not happy."

" I can see no reason why she should be unhappy. I can satisfy her every whim."

If Oliver could have spoken his mind he would have told Mr. Padstow to look in the glass and reflect on his face and his figure ; but even then he would not have gone to the root of the matter. He could have forgiven the man his years and his appearance if he had been more to his taste in other ways. He was probably not a bad sort as such men go. Probably he would be

liberal with his money and as kind to Jane as a self indulgent, rather dull-witted man can be. But he was of a common grain ; he had an accent that offended Oliver's ears, not grossly but just enough at times to make the difference. Anyhow, in spite of his money, Oliver did not want him in the family.

XXVIII

"YOUR brother insists on our waiting at least six months before we are officially engaged," said Mr. Padstow in an aggrieved voice.

"That's Christian," said Jane.

"What do you mean? I've been talking to your brother for nearly an hour, and offering—well, it's no use telling a child like you what I offered. I suppose all you know about money is that you can buy chocolate with it."

"Oh, is it? As it happens I'm very good at figures. I was top of my form in arithmetic and algebra at school, and I never get into money muddles like that fool Clare. By rights I ought to marry a poor man."

"Why?"

"I should make him such a good wife——"

"I hope you will make me a good wife. It would be a great pity if you threw yourself away on a poor man."

"I'm going to throw myself away on you, George, so don't look so peevish. When would you like to be married?"

"The sooner the better," said Mr. Padstow and edged a little nearer to Jane whom he found to his

torment always composed and elusive. She had not let him kiss her yet.

"We must get the Fête over and then we'll talk about it again," decided Jane.

"But meanwhile——"

"As we were, of course. We must give Oliver a chance to come round—say a fortnight!"

"Why should Mrs. Hawke be against our marriage? I should have thought——"

"You'd have thought she'd be glad to get rid of me and have her house to herself. My dear man, that just shows you don't know either Christian or me. I'm charming to live with."

"I'm sure you are. That is why I'm so anxious to have my little sunbeam always with me."

"What nice things you say! So different from Oliver."

"I suppose it's all right," said Oliver, coming further into the room; for he had opened the door as Jane was speaking. "Jane says you have arranged that my wife and I are to go back in the small car. We are just off."

Mr. Padstow half rose from his seat, stared blankly at Oliver's back and sat down again.

"Why did you do that?" he said to Jane.

"I couldn't go all that way alone with you now that you've proposed to me," explained Jane with an air of demure and rather scandalised propriety that sat absurdly on her and made anyone who knew her well, either laugh or long to shake her. "We should have had to have one of the others with us. But if I had invited Clare or Christian you would have had to take one of those horrid little back seats and at your age——"

"We could quite well have returned as we came," interrupted the aggrieved lover. "I fully intended to."

"I didn't," said Jane. "We might have had Mr. Cockshott, but that would have been boring. He is such a tiresome young man."

"Is he?"

"Yes; he talks too much. Christian and I loathe him."

"I'm sorry."

"Never mind. You asked him with the best intentions, I'm sure, and of course Clare ought to have taken him in hand, but he is not Clare's kind either. He told me yesterday that he belonged to the Intelligentsia and that he was out to shoot capitalists."

"Bless me!" said Mr. Padstow showing signs of surprise. "I knew he was rather advanced."

"As advanced as a highwayman," said Jane derisively. "But never mind him, George! He is of no importance compared with Japanese lanterns. Can you afford a thousand?"

"I can afford you anything you want, in reason."

"It won't be money thrown away because we can use them again whenever we want to celebrate anything. I love Japanese lanterns, don't you?"

"I've no objection to them," said Mr. Padstow.

"I think the invitations ought to go out the moment we get back," continued Jane; and so the invitations did go out in the second week of July for an 'At Home' at Ashdown on Saturday August 1st and for some time the neighbourhood talked of it. They also talked of Jane and knew exactly what had happened. But they knew so many things, all different, that their talk did

not matter much. Mr. Padstow said that he wished the crowning moment of his Fête to be the announcement of his coming marriage to Jane and he proposed to make it on the terrace in front of his house with all his windows lighted behind him, Japanese lanterns swinging on ropes (in default of trees) and a display of fireworks with a set piece inviting Providence to bless the happy pair.

"You have such charming ideas," said Jane and promised to consult Oliver; which she did at dinner that night. All he said was: "Don't be silly"; and she had to transmit this injunction to her impatient lover next day. The result was that Mr. Padstow made up his mind to put his case before Christian and ask her to use her influence with Oliver in his favour. To this end he called at Maniton one afternoon about ten days after their return, and had the good luck to find her by herself in the garden. By that time the foreign political news had become alarming; but Christian sat peacefully in the shade of a great elm tree reading "Pride and Prejudice." The war imminent between Austria and Servia seemed as remote that afternoon from that English home as news of an earthquake registered on seismographs but occurring in regions uninhabited by men.

"The news is rather better to-day," Mr. Padstow began, seeing the day's paper at her feet.

"Is it?" said Christian. She wondered why her visitor had come. Jane had gone to lunch and tea with the Favershams, and Oliver was always out at this early hour in the afternoon. But the Fête seemed to make endless opportunities for Mr. Padstow. She would be glad when it was over. If he had not wanted

to marry Jane she could have put up with him as a rather dull, floridly gallant acquaintance. But, like Oliver, she did not want him in the family. Besides, for Jane's sake the idea was repugnant to her.

"Yes," said Mr. Padstow, "if the war can be localised it will not matter much to us. But I've not come here to talk European politics. They concern the sterner sex and not beautiful ladies."

"Women suffer as much as men from men's blunders," said Christian rather dryly. The stupid creature's tone irritated her and whenever she was in his company she wondered how Jane could contemplate enduring it for life. His mind was unfurnished; he had staring eyes and he judged all things in terms of money.

"Perhaps they do; perhaps they do," he admitted. "If I had my way all young charming women should live in the lap of luxury."

"Women are not wedded to luxury," she said with a touch of scorn. "They follow men into the wilderness if they care enough for the man."

"They probably repent at leisure. In my opinion no man ought to ask a girl to marry him unless he can give her all she wants."

"But she may want things money cannot buy."

"What sort of things?"

Christian hesitated. She did not like to say that youth was one thing, because it would have sounded so obvious and unkind.

"Qualities of character——" she began.

Mr. Padstow drew himself up a little and fondled his moustache.

"Character is important," he said. "To be sure

character is important, especially when a girl is particularly vivacious and even a little reckless. A girl like that does well to marry a steady man rather older than she is."

"But not a great deal older," said Christian.

"After all a man can't help his age," argued Mr. Padstow.

"But he can help his marriage."

"In a sense he can; in a sense he can't. I'm very much in love, Mrs. Hawke."

"I'm sorry——" murmured Christian not knowing what to say next.

"I suppose you mean to say that Jane is not."

Christian looked at the pages of "Pride and Prejudice" and felt most uncomfortable.

"I don't expect it," Mr. Padstow went on. "I don't even think it necessary. I suppose I have continental ideas of marriage. I intend to make Jane an excellent husband and if I may say so I consider that she might do worse."

Christian still looked at "Pride and Prejudice."

"Perhaps it is not quite the right moment to mention it," said Mr. Padstow, "but I have at least forty thousand a year."

"You spoke to Oliver, didn't you?" said Christian.

"Yes. He wants us to wait; but what is there to wait for?"

"He thinks Jane is too young to understand what she is doing."

"I'm afraid I can't agree with him. The modern girl knows very well what she is doing as a rule. Jane is quite wide awake."

"I agree with Oliver," said Christian.

Mr. Padstow began to feel annoyed. He had thought that Christian would be easy to persuade and cajole for if you had asked him to describe her he would have told you that she was a ' quiet little thing ' ; and, obviously, quiet little female things ought to yield their judgment to their seniors and superiors.

" I don't like the present position," he said. " It's neither one thing nor the other. I have no status. I want a status."

" You had better speak to Oliver again. There he comes ! "

" Can't you speak for me, Mrs. Hawke ? I wish you would."

" What can I say ? "

" Tell him that I'm in a hurry. Break the ice for me."

Christian instead of answering gave her immediate attention to the puppy who had just bounded into her lap. Beyond him to her great relief she saw Oliver with Wickham and a tea tray in the distance.

" Mr. Padstow is in a hurry," she said when her husband was near enough to hear her.

" Anything important ? " asked Oliver shaking hands. " Have the Japanese lanterns turned up missing ? "

Mr. Padstow watched Wickham arrange his tea-tray, let him depart and then said anxiously :

" I am in a hurry."

" What for ? "

" I want my engagement to Jane proclaimed publicly on Saturday."

" So Jane told me."

" She thinks it a charming idea. So do I. I want

to warn you that we shall probably take our affairs into our own hands and make the announcement."

Oliver got up, took a cup of tea from Christian's hands and offered it to Mr. Padstow.

" Very well," he said to Christian's surprise. " But don't blame me if six weeks hence Jane jilts you. I don't want her to behave badly so I don't want the engagement to take place. I'm certain the marriage never will."

" We shall be married in September and go to Paris and the Italian Lakes," said Mr. Padstow.

XXIX

THE Fête at Ashdown House took place. That very day the Times announced that people were still booking for a continental holiday and having read this paragraph when the paper came at tea-time, Mr. Padstow assured everyone that there would be no European war. These things settled themselves at the last moment. He was not as young as he had been and he had seen it happen over and over again. Fashoda, the Kaiser's telegram to Kruger, the *Panther* at Agadir. A scare, a flurry and then the status quo. His most decorative guest was missing because he had been recalled to his regiment ; and this rather dimmed the glory of the entertainment. But a great many were left. The band and the supper were the best London could supply, the garden was as light as day in some places and religiously dim in others, everyone was glad to meet everyone else because some knew nothing while others were primed with exclusive information that they wished to impart; and, while public interest concentrated on Europe in arms private curiosity wondered what the truth was about Mr. Padstow and Jane. Most people liked her, but Clare and Mrs. Sam Bluett, who did not, agreed that she gave herself airs of

possession which were irritating and absurd. She had done her hair in a new way that made her look much older, she wore an orange coloured chiffon, orange coloured shoes and two or three little oranges instead of flowers at her waist and when she went into the garden with Mr. Padstow she put on a creation in elephant grey velvet with orange touches that as its creator said " expressed " her frock.

" You do know how to dress," he said to her admiringly.

" Christian gave me these things when we were in London," said Jane. " It was very brave of her."

" Brave ? "

" Yes. Oliver doesn't allow her to spend her money on Clare and me, but she did it. I expect he beat her when he found out."

Mr. Padstow's round mirthless eyes grew fixed in earnest disapproval.

" You don't mean to say——" he began and then stopped short because Jane's rippling laughter discomfited him.

" Aren't you *ever* serious ? " he inquired. " I wish I knew—— "

" Knew what ? "

" Whether you really mean it ? "

" Mean what ? "

" That you want me to announce our engagement at supper to-night. You won't play some trick—— "

" Is it likely ? "

Jane cast her eyes around the lighted gardens where other couples were promenading, and at the large house lighted from top to bottom, and then at the man beside her who declared himself her devoted slave.

" Won't life be a bean-feast ? " she said. " We shall enjoy ourselves."

" I wish I was as young as you," the infatuated man murmured with a sigh ; and as he was getting into one of the sentimental moods that Jane made it her business to stave off, she suddenly left him planted on the lawn while she whisked across it in order to talk to Oliver and Christian. But she did not tell them what was to happen at supper.

So, although they should have been prepared, it came as a shock when Mr. Padstow got on his feet and told the crowded room that he was the happiest man in the world. He made a long rambling speech that linked the European situation with the revels at Ashdown and his own forthcoming marriage ; and when he invited everyone present to drink to Jane everyone rose with relief because he had finished. They drank and they began in civility to congratulate and cheer. Christian amidst some noise and movement felt frost in the air, mirth, frost and disapproval. She watched people's faces, she became conscious of a growing silence that for a moment she connected with the event of the hour. Then, suddenly she understood that the event of Jane's betrothal had no significance or interest compared with what was happening outside ; and that the bigger world, about to be riven asunder, had its clutch here too and was sending signs by its messengers. Mr. Padstow's butler had come in with telegrams on a silver salver and he went here and there amongst the little tables delivering them. The men to whom they were addressed read them, rose and went up to their host. They were recalled to their ships and regiments and had to leave at once. Few people heard what

they said, but everyone knew what had happened when they went out leaving a change of spirit behind them. The men all looked serious now and the women anxious. Only Mr. Cockshott's squeaky treble was heard above other voices saying that he felt sure the Government would be turned out in a week if it dared to provoke the Germans, since the proletariat was determined to live on friendly terms with that great and humane people. He expressed other political views of the kind men of his kidney did express in those days, but no one except Miss Millet seemed inclined to listen to him. She gazed at him with awe, and murmured to old Mr. Bluett that the young man was so clever and advanced she could hardly understand what he was saying. Oliver got up directly some of the older people made a move and took Christian into the garden. They wandered on together until they found a summer house and sat down there together, both silent for a time and both anxious. Their anxieties were undefined as yet, but everyone knows the state of mind when the future threatens to break, and terrify, although the moment and the way are still hidden.

"I can't think much of marriage and giving in marriage to-night," said Christian. "I don't remember the Boer War, I was only three when it broke out, but my father volunteered and was killed. If England joins in now will they want men?"

"I suppose so," said Oliver.

* * * * * * *

It was all very well to escape from the supper room and sit peacefully together in the gloom of the unlighted

summer house, but Oliver and Christian had to go back to the ball-room for a short time, and on their appearance to receive the two-edged congratulations of people who were either horrified or smiling at the idea of Jane's marriage.

"I'm not going to say I'm pleased, because I'm not," said Lady Faversham. "I don't believe in May and December. You ought never to have given your consent, Oliver. I thought better of you."

He bowed.

"You ought to know Oliver better," cried Christian firing up so quickly that the old lady smiled and patted her cheek. "He did not consent. At least he said they must wait till Jane was older."

"So sensible of Jane," said someone else. "My own girl wouldn't look at him, but she is one of those romantic people—— "

"Jane likes plenty of butter with her bread," said Mr. Sam Bluett, "I don't blame her. I don't blame Padstow either. A man with as much money as that can get what he fancies as a rule."

"What diamonds she will have," sighed Mrs. Sam Bluett.

"You will have your house to yourselves now," said Clare strolling up to them. "Are they going to be married at once? John thinks we shall all be at war in a few days. Won't it be thrilling? I remember the Boer War so well. I remember the wire coming to say your father was killed, Christian. I was helping with a Café Chantant for the soldiers and mother wouldn't let me go. So unpatriotic of her. If we have a war we must all be patriotic and get up things. Jane can lend these grounds for a Bazaar. She will be

the richest woman in the county now. It's so wise and plucky of her to put up with the little disadvantages isn't it ? His age, I mean, and his false teeth and his common voice. After all, those things are just the price she pays for his money, and you don't get much in this world without paying for it. Don't they look absurd standing side by side like that ? He tried to go round with her just before you came in but the poor old thing got dizzy and had to stop. People noticed your making off in that odd way, Oliver. Why did you ? You must have known what Mr. Padstow was after and you did nothing to stop it. In fact your friends blame you more than Jane. She is such a child that she doesn't know what she is doing."

* * * * * * *

" I suppose you are very angry with us," Mr. Padstow said to Oliver when most of his guests had departed and he stood in a quiet corner of the hall with his future brother-in-law. " I wanted to wait till you had come round to our point of view. I felt sure it was a matter of time and although I naturally don't want to wait long—— "

" I hope you are not apologising, George," said Jane coming towards the two men with Christian. " Who was it said you should never explain and never apologise ? We've all had a most amusing evening and it took people's thoughts off the war to hear about us in that sudden way. Of course if there is a war we shall have to reconsider everything. Getting married would seem so frivolous."

The eyes of the two men met for a moment, but Oliver only said that it was three o'clock and that if

Jane had finished talking he would like to go home. When they were in the car he hardly spoke at first and Christian, too, was in one of her silent moods ; but Jane's spirits were not subdued by their want of enthusiasm.

" I suppose you know that you didn't congratulate us," she said in the midst of an account of George's nervousness and the measures she had taken to stimulate him. " It was very marked the way you stalked out of the room, Oliver, dragging Christian after you. People noticed it. I told them you were not quite well."

" I'm not going to congratulate you now," said Oliver. " I'm sorry for Padstow and I'm ashamed of you."

" Oliver ! "

It was Christian who spoke, distressed by the severity of her husband's tone ; but he did not soften what he had said, nor did Jane meet it with her usual show of indifference. She huddled silently into her corner of the car and did not speak again until they were within the gates of Maniton. Then she said :

" I thought men valued money."

Oliver did not speak, so she spoke again.

" Shall I ever have any money of my own, Oliver ? "

" You will have five thousand pounds when you are of age or settled on you when you marry. Didn't you know that ? "

" How should I know it ? Whose money is it ? "

" It was left to you by father. It isn't much. He hadn't much to leave. It only brings in about £150 a year."

" I've never had it."

"When Raymond was alive it helped with your school-bills. I was going to let it accumulate to help with your trousseau some day."

"Have you been paying for my clothes and things yourself, then?"

"Why not?"

Jane looked reflectively out of the window at the faint lights of dawn in the sky.

"I can't understand why you are not overjoyed," she said. "I understand Christian, but you puzzle me. You're a hard man in some ways and you're fond of money. At least you've made it and you know how to keep it. Why don't you want me to be a rich woman?"

"We want you to be happy," said Christian answering for her husband.

"Can't one be rich and happy?" asked Jane, knowing that Oliver would be infuriated by the disingenuousness of such a question put in her usual demure provocative tone. However he did not answer it.

XXX

In some remote corners of rural England the first few weeks of the war hardly affected everyday life. People bathed and picnicked as usual, pitied the poor Belgians, were startled without much understanding by the onrush of the Germans and felt mildly annoyed by the new paper money. Otherwise they took the world war much as the old farmer did, who, on being told about it, scratched his ear meditatively and said, "Oi don't see what it has to do with oi." He did see later when the war made a rich man of him and he bought farms for his three sons.

Granfield saw it very soon because some of its environs became a training ground for Kitchener's men. Clare saw it when John joined his old regiment leaving her alone at Highwood, and Christian saw it in Oliver's face long before he told her he was going to volunteer. John had offered to get him a commission in the Rutlands and he must go for his training first to Chatham.

He did not propose that she should leave her house and perch near him in a hotel or lodgings. She wished he would. But he wanted her to stay on at Maniton.

"I would rather you and Jane stayed here; at any rate for the present," he said. "There is a good deal to look after. I shall be able to run down sometimes while I am training, but later——"

"We ought to take in several Belgians," said Jane.

"You may; but in that case I shall ask Miss Millet to come here again. I met her in Granfield to-day and she told me that she was looking for a job."

"I cannot see any connection between Belgians and Miss Millet," said Christian. "I only half like her and I don't know that I want her here."

"I do," said Oliver.

"He would not wish to come back and find you had made off with a seductive Belgian," explained Jane.

But Oliver was not ready yet to be argued or teased out of his belief that the two young women ought to have an older woman with them in his absence; and he wrote to Miss Millet engaging her to live at Maniton while he was away from home. Christian made no further objection. Whatever Oliver desired she would do gladly and faithfully under the circumstances. Perhaps by Christmas the war would be over and he in his right place again. Perhaps he would never have to go to France at all.

So in those early days of our changed world Christian, Jane and Clare began a new life in conditions none of them had tried before or expected to last long. Clare made herself busy from the first as women of her type did. Christian soon found her step-sister's activities so inconvenient that she had to put her foot down and explain that she could not lend the Maniton car to Highwood every day of the week. Then, with Christian's warm approval, the chauffeur joined up and

before he had trained long, was driving and mending cars in France.

"You will have to get someone else," said Clare. "In times like these we can't do without a car."

"I am not going to get anyone else," said Christian.

"How are we to get about?"

"We all have bicycles and you have the pony cart."

Clare looked pained and surprised.

"I can't ride a bicycle," she said, "at least I won't. I should not have the same influence if I arrived at places with my hair in wisps and my shoes muddy. It is so important to keep one's head and carry on as usual; and all the work of these theatricals and the big Bazaar seems to devolve on me."

"All she does for the theatricals is to grab the best parts and the most indecent costumes," said Jane in Miss Millet's shocked presence. "Three yards of gauze and some beads. It's for her country, she says."

"I'm sometimes glad that our dear Belgian guests can't follow you," said Miss Millet. "They would get such a mistaken impression of our English *jeune fille* who is as modest and retiring in her heart as their own maidens. I like the word maiden. It suggests fragrance and tranquil propriety."

"It suggests a large wooden clothes horse to me," said Jane. "Mrs. Stoughton has one in the back kitchen that she calls a maiden."

"Mrs. Stoughton is beginning to say that she ought to be working for her country," said Christian. "She would like to cook for a camp or for an officers' mess."

"So should I," said Jane. "What fun it would be! That silly old Wiggles is ordering the dinner for his mess, he says, and arguing with his cook about eggs

and butter. I should love to hear Wiggles and Mrs. Stoughton standing up to each other."

"Is he writing to you regularly?" asked Christian next time she was alone with Jane.

"No; irregularly. But I had a letter day before yesterday."

"Does he know you are engaged to Mr. Padstow?"

"I told him; but he won't believe it."

Christian could hardly believe it herself in these days. Mr. Padstow had tried to hurry on his marriage at the outbreak of war but Jane had refused to consider it. She said that when she married she must fix her mind on clothes for three months beforehand and that at present she was obliged to fix it on Belgians and bazaars.

"I wish you'd fix it on me for a change," said Mr. Padstow; for he was not getting much satisfaction out of his engagement or indeed out of life in general at present. Jane had insisted on his opening his house to Belgians and to please her he had done so; but now that they were there he did not like them. They quarrelled amongst themselves, he said. Besides, their dogs and cats were spoiling his new brocades.

"How can you be so selfish?" said Jane. "What are a few brocades compared with being driven out of your home at the sword's point? How would you like that?"

Mr. Padstow admitted that he would not like it at all, but added that he was going to be driven from his home before long by a lack of servants. Male and female they were all restless and burning to escape from the flats of domestic life to the heights of active patriotism. He could not blame them, but he pointed

out to Jane that if the maids went the Belgians must go too. Even she could not expect him to cook and scrub for them with his own hands. "Why not?" said Jane; and Mr. Padstow showed a little temper. They were not getting on quite as well as he wished; but he put it down to the war and to the general excitement ensuing. Everyone was on edge.

Christian had no time for nerves of any kind, because her household affairs had become complicated. She sometimes thought when she went to bed at night that the day's work had made her a year older. There was so much to do and so many people to control and pacify. The Belgians did not like English food, and wanted what Mrs. Stoughton called foreign messes. Perhaps she could have borne that, but two of the ladies began to invade her kitchen at all sorts of hours; even, on one occasion, when dinner was going on in the 'hall.' That she could not stomach, she said, and would have left on the spot if Christian had not shown distress and asked her to stay on till Oliver came home on leave. She stayed but behaved with great rudeness to the Belgians and Miss Millet, whom she suspected of thinking her extravagant. When she was rude Miss Millet dissolved in tears and went about the house in a damp condition till Christian comforted her. The office of comforter and peacemaker is honourable but fatiguing and Christian sometimes wished she could escape to a garret where she might live by herself with a book and a tea-kettle. She was sensible enough to take each day as it came, and make the best she could of its tasks and its difficulties; and she no more realised what her new responsibilities were doing for her than a man working at a craft or at a language realises in

mid-stream how far he has progressed towards mastery. At any moment he is not doing much better than he did the hour before and he must look back to the beginning of things to know that he has marched on.

When Oliver came home on leave for the first time Christian was at the station to meet him, and as they found each other they were both conscious of change as well as of delight ; but especially of delight.

" You look well, Oliver."

" I'm very well. You look tired. What have you been doing ? "

" Where is your luggage ? "

" I've nothing but this suit-case. Have you a car or a cab outside ? "

" I've brought the car."

" But who drove it ? "

" I did."

" You ! You drive a car ! "

" I learned before Tyson left. So did Jane. We were sure it would come in useful and it does. You don't mind, do you ? "

" I don't know. I've not taken it in yet. I don't believe it yet. Why didn't you tell me ? "

" I wanted to surprise you."

" Well, you've done that," said Oliver and when they got outside the station he was going to take the driver's seat himself. But Christian would not have it.

" I want to show you that I can drive," she said ; and she did so skilfully.

" I'm not sure that I want you to do it though," said Oliver when they were at home again.

" I don't want you to go soldiering," she countered. " The war forces things on us."

In the course of the next twenty-four hours he discovered that his absence and the conditions of war had forced various matters on his wife that had not been in her hands formerly; and with considerable satisfaction he found that although he was entertaining six Belgians the housekeeping accounts were less than they had been when he controlled them. He asked whether he had Mrs. Stoughton or Miss Millet to thank for this.

"Mrs. Stoughton would be very extravagant if I allowed it and Miss Millet has nothing to do with the housekeeping," said Christian.

Oliver considered this reply while he looked at his wife. She sat at her writing table with her profile towards him and perhaps for the first time he realised that though her features were delicately cut the lines of them were strong. That charming chin was not the chin of a weak woman.

"What does Miss Millet do?" he asked. "I suppose she is of some use."

"None whatever," said Christian.

"But I put her here—— "

"Yes."

"To look after you and Jane."

"In what way?"

"Well—as an older woman does look after two very young ones."

"You put her in the wrong house. You should have sent her to Highwood."

"Clare is ten years older than you. Besides I'm not her keeper."

Christian, with seeming irrelevance, took a small red morocco book from an open drawer on her right hand

and gave it to her husband. He saw that it was his Bank book.

" It came yesterday in the same envelope as mine," she said.

" Some careless clerk I suppose."

Oliver was frowning and annoyed ; but he put the book in his pocket and asked no questions. Christian too was silent ; so silent and aloof that he saw something must be wrong.

" What's the matter ? " he said with premonition ; but when she answered him she spoke lightly and got up as if she wished to end discussion.

" I think it is you who want looking after," she said.

" What do you mean ? "

" I'm sorry, Oliver, but I opened your book first in mistake for my own and the first entry I saw was the three hundred pounds you paid Clare before our marriage ; I couldn't make out what had happened because there had been some change of investments with her then, so I looked back and saw the name of her milliner Suzanne. I knew I had not paid for that ermine. That was all I saw. I'm very sorry. It was like opening someone else's letter and reading it by mistake."

" I'm sorry too," said Oliver, looking greatly put out. " You will probably get all sorts of ideas into your head now."

" Oh dear no," said Christian. " I'm not afraid of Clare. But I think we ought to promise each other not to give her any more money. Was she borrowing from you again that night some time ago when I found her in your room, on your knee ? "

"I have lent her nothing since our marriage," said Oliver, "and as for her being on my knee——"

"You couldn't help it. My dear man, I know Clare."

"She had come to talk about your visit to Highwood."

"Ye—es," said Christian thoughtfully. "You and John hatched that plan, didn't you? Poor old John!"

XXXI

It was during this leave that Oliver had a business interview with his solicitors and then with Mr. Cockshott who, after a little difference with his firm, had given up the law and was looking for a job as land agent.

"You know I shall be going out any day now," Oliver said to Christian when he got home, "I've been arranging things."

They were sitting together over the log fire in Christian's room and had just had tea there. The other rooms seemed to Oliver to be full of Belgians, and Miss Millet, and when he could he avoided them. They were all tiresome. He commended Christian's sense in keeping her own room as a refuge to which she could escape at times, and he appreciated the daintiness and peace of it this afternoon. He wished he was not leaving her to battle with such various people and such a disorganised household, but he was taking away with him a new conception of her. Subtly and almost imperceptibly the terms between them were undergoing a change. She was absurdly young still; too young for the business thrust upon her; but she was shouldering it with a composure that he had

to respect. All the more reason for him to lighten the burden for her where he could. He congratulated himself on what he had done in that way this afternoon. While he talked he was trying to fix her image in his memory so that it should be as clear and live when they were separated as it was now. But he knew it never would be quite. The translucent depths of her eyes, the way her hair grew, her hands, her smile, her voice, the firelight glow in which she sat, the scent of violets and burning wood in the room, all these he would remember. But something would have gone too ; that sense of reality incomparably more precious than any dream ; that actual nearness of her and the touch of her hand on his hair when he had first come in rather tired and sat down. He had leaned his head on her shoulder till tea came, told her he liked the velvet frock she wore, made love to her and laughed at her. How lucky and happy he had been in his home and his marriage ; but not for long.

" Yes," he said, " I've been arranging things. I hope you will have no difficulties, but if you have go to Sam Bluett about them."

" I should naturally do that if they were concerned with money or business," said Christian. " I know he is your solicitor. He is John's too and he drew up our marriage settlements."

" I've given him a power of attorney."

" What does that mean ? "

" It gives him authority to act for me in certain cases."

Christian was thinking too. As she sat there pouring out tea she was so close to Oliver that she could hardly move without touching him ; and soon he would be

gone, leaving her memories. She could not take much heed of money matters in that hour, but she must listen as well as she could. He should not find her a silly inattentive woman.

" I'll remember," she said.

" Then there is the outdoor work. It is too much for you to undertake. Besides you don't understand it. I'm putting it in the hands of an agent."

Christian was startled and showed it; not over pleased either.

" Has anything gone wrong with the out-door work?" she asked.

" Nothing at all. You and Jane have done very well so far."

" There has not been a great deal to do. The men who have been here for years carry on as usual and Wickham sees to the accounts with me."

" I know. I've found everything in order, but then I left everything arranged. Now I'm going right away and there will be more to do. Those cottages are about finished. The people who are to have them must go in, and the old ones must be repaired. You and Jane can't see to repairing cottages. Besides some of the younger men are joining up, and have to be replaced. You can't be expected to find out-door men and engage them."

" Who is to be your agent ? "

" Cockshott ! "

" That insufferable young man ! "

" Well, you needn't have much to do with him. As long as he does his work well his personality doesn't matter."

" Why isn't he fighting ? "

" He has something wrong with one of his feet. He'll be with me till I go and then he'll take over. Bluett thinks he'll be all right."

Christian disliked the appointment intensely, and so did Jane ; but they took different views of what they were to say and do about it.

" I can't vex Oliver," said Christian.

" I can," said Jane. " I shall tell him he's a fool ! "

" He must manage his affairs in his own way."

" But he goes off and leaves us to look after Milly and Mr. Cockshott. Here he comes ! Oliver, as we are both of such tender years, I think you should be more considerate. Christian and I are prepared to manage ourselves, the house, the Belgians, the garden, the car and the estate, but we are not prepared to manage Milly and Cocky. We wish you would remove them both. I may tell you in confidence that I am uneasy about Milly. I fear she is going astray. Of course his purpose, like Romeo's may be marriage, but one never knows ; and at Milly's age you can't be too careful."

" What is she ragging about now ? " said Oliver sinking in a corner of the Chesterfield in Christian's room as if he were tired. " I'm glad you haven't a tongue, Christian. People with tongues can be very fatiguing."

Jane, who was standing on the hearthrug, cut a caper ; an accomplishment she had recently acquired from a Belgian who was a dancing-master and who had just left them to teach dancing at Granfield.

" I must go," she said blowing a kiss to her brother. " I just came to tell you that I am off to Granfield to meet George. He has asked Clare and me to tea at

the Pavilion. They have a Belgian confectioner there who makes meringues and I've a bet on with Clare that I'll eat more than she can. Clare is very *liée* with George nowadays. But I'm not jealous. In fact I encourage the young things. It keeps them both quiet."

"What is happening there?" asked Oliver; but Christian had nothing new to tell him. Mr. Padstow and Jane were still officially engaged but were not much together, and Clare was seeing a good deal of him. They were both prominent war workers when the work entailed spending money and getting up entertainments and Clare had begun to go about in a khaki costume that was not an official uniform but looked as like one as made no odds. She complained that it was unbecoming, but said she did not mind hiding her looks under a bushel while darling John was away. Oliver saw her several times while he was home on leave and on one occasion she told him that in spite of his brutal behaviour his image still lived in her heart. She presented him with a silver charm that she invited him to wear as a mascot but chose the wrong moment to make the offering; for Jane came in unexpectedly, saw it in his hands, and asked her if it was the last of a dozen she had bought some time ago in Granfield when they were being sold at a reduction. Oliver when his leave was over went away with a feeling that, except his wife, most people were much what they had been before. She was being swiftly formed and developed by the new responsibilities the needs of the day thrust upon her.

Soon after he left Miss Millet's affairs occupied her time and attention in a troublesome way. A rather

doubtful elderly Belgian who called himself a baron had paid his addresses to the silly little woman, probably with some idea of securing extra comforts and privileges by her aid. Everyone except Miss Millet could see that he was not serious and not even respectful. He made flowery speeches with mockery in his manner and only sought her company when he wanted anything. He was in fact a hardened *bon viveur* of narrow means and about as likely as the man in the moon to marry a plain penniless Englishwoman. But Miss Millet, with all her time on her hands, was enjoying her first love affair and worked herself into a state of fidgetty excitement that Christian found difficult to handle. There were scenes at Maniton, silly scenes of jealousy when the baron paid more attention to one of his countrywomen than he did to Miss Millet ; or even when he exchanged badinage with Jane. The two young women who were actually running the house found her emotions a troublesome addition to the daily round, and Jane wanted to tell Oliver that he must kindly but firmly dismiss her. Christian, however, refused to have Oliver vexed with home affairs. He was at Ypres now.

The situation was simplified one day by the baron himself who went out after breakfast with a despatch case in his hand and was never seen again in the neighbourhood. He left a note for Christian thanking her for her hospitality, but saying that country life did not agree with him. He was going to try his luck in London. No one at Maniton ever heard from him again, but it was found that he owed money at most of the Granfield shops. In the house he had borrowed from anyone who would lend, including Wickham and

Mrs. Stoughton's successor. As for poor foolish Miss Millet he had picked her clean.

"I am sure he will pay me back," she said tearfully. "He has gone out into a cruel world to earn his bread. What can a man do more?"

"He was a knave," said Jane.

"I cannot hear him spoken of in that way," said Miss Millet. "I still consider him my future husband. He said once that I should make a delicious baroness."

"He is not a baron," said Christian.

"That I refuse to believe," said Miss Millet and went on to explain that the atmosphere of Maniton had become painful to her. She feared, she greatly feared, that she must give up her trust. She hated doing so in Mr. Hawke's absence. He had confided his young wife and sister to her care, and she had accepted the charge with every intention of doing her duty by them faithfully. But she had felt of late that their relations had become strained. They did not consult her; they were inclined to treat her as a cipher in the house, and it is not honest for a cipher to accept a large salary. She only wished to do what was right, but . . . .

It was an uncomfortable hour because she would have stayed on if pressed; but she was not pressed and had to abide by her own decision. Christian and Jane were both kind to her, but they let her go. In fact they counted the days till she did go and breathed with relief when she drove away—in tears and leaving her address for the baron. Mr. Padstow had come handsomely to the rescue by discovering an aged aunt who was in need of a companion, because her own had deserted her to do war work.

"Shall you tell Oliver that she has gone?" asked Jane.

"Yes," said Christian after a little thought. "I shall tell him and I shall say that we will not have anyone in her place. It is too much trouble."

"Suppose he insists?"

"I don't think he will," said Christian.

XXXII

It was inevitable that either Christian or Jane should see Mr. Cockshott nearly every day ; for Maniton was one of those small properties that are managed in every detail by the owners. They did not think the new agent satisfactory. He knew nothing about the business he had undertaken, and, though Oliver had found him obsequious, the two young women did not. His tone suggested that difference of sex implies difference of brains and judgment. Perhaps it does ; but Jane who had lived at Maniton all her life knew more about early potatoes than Mr. Cockshott did ; and as he would not take her advice Maniton was late and had to sell its potatoes in a falling market. He made other mistakes too ; but at first Christian was too busy with her crowded household to pay much attention to what went on out of doors ; and when the Belgians found work or new havens her thoughts were suddenly much occupied with Jane's affairs.

The crisis came with the arrival of a telegram from Ambrose March, asking to be put up at Maniton for a night or two while he was on leave. If the telegram had come discreetly when no one was there to see its effect no harm need have been done ; but Wickham brought it in at tea time and Mr. Padstow happened

to be present as well as Clare. First there was a hush while Christian opened it and read it, for there had been stiff fighting in Flanders and the Rutlands had had heavy losses ; but she looked up quickly with a smiling face, told Wickham to wait for an answer, and perhaps forgetting everything but her own intense relief, said to Jane :

" Wiggles is coming ! "

Upon which Jane, also rather off her balance, blushed.

" And pray who is Wiggles ? " inquired Mr. Padstow addressing Jane with a proprietary air that made the schoolgirl, still in her, long to smack him. For, as she had lately informed him, he was not her proprietor yet and never would be unless he was careful. Moreover she did not mean to be any man's property at any time of her life. Mr. Padstow feared she was imbibing revolutionary sentiments from Mr. Cockshott whom she saw oftener and longer than he considered desirable ; but at the moment all he could do was to acquiesce outwardly and say to himself like the villain in a melodrama—The time will come !

Mr. Cockshott he did not fear seriously ; but who was Wiggles that Jane should blush and Christian smile radiantly for him ? Mr. Padstow in the pause ensuing on his question looked at Clare ; while the ladies of the house followed by Wickham went to a writing-table and filled in the reply paid form.

" Dear old Wiggles ! " said Clare. " He'll be handsomer than ever in khaki. Hasn't Jane told you all about him ? "

" What is there to tell ? "

Clare shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"A boy and girl attachment. They hardly ever come to much, do they? Though one never knows now what may happen. I think these hasty war marriages are such a mistake; don't you? When I see a chance of preventing one I do."

"Yes—yes," murmured Mr. Padstow vexed and inattentive, for he was watching Wickham depart with the telegram on his salver. Otherwise he might have been amused by Clare's last remark; because it was notorious in Granfield that she had recently nipped a marriage in the bud by a hot and strong flirtation with khaki.

"It is not my business of course," she continued in a confidential undertone, "but I can't think what you are waiting for."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mr. Padstow.

"You should put your foot down."

"It isn't so easy."

"Women like men to be men."

"I suppose they do."

Mr. Padstow's voice quavered slightly and he looked at Jane on her way back to the tea-table as if he thought an immediate attack might be desirable but was uncertain in its consequences. For some time past his impatience with Jane's delays had been growing, but he had not liked to bring matters to a head because he did not want to be dismissed; and Jane had given him to understand that he would be if he tried to hurry and worry her. Her thoughts were not on marriage she told him. She was working eight hours a day in the dispensary at a military hospital and giving satisfaction. However, his sense of wrong, the advent of Wiggles and Clare's whispered advice, all pushed him

in one direction and when Clare got up to go he stayed behind, although Jane informed him at once that she had ' tons ' of things to do. Christian had gone with Clare to see her as far as the creek.

" You always say that when I come to see you," complained Mr. Padstow. " It really is unsatisfactory."

" Beastly," agreed Jane lighting a cigarette. " I often wish for the good old days when we could loaf from morning till night. I wonder if they'll ever come again ? "

" I thought Oliver objected to your smoking ? "

" He never said so. Besides—— "

" Besides what ? "

" I do as I please. Don't you know that much about me yet, George ? "

" But you might show some consideration for others."

" Who is complaining that I am inconsiderate ? "

" I do ; most emphatically ; I do."

" Does it make you sick then ? Sorry. I'll throw it away."

Jane made a pretence of throwing her cigarette away and Mr. Padstow flung himself sideways in his chair with a violence that caused some tea-cups close to him to rattle in their saucers.

" You nearly smashed that china," said Jane reproachfully. " Do you feel very bad ? I say ; hadn't we better go into the garden ? "

" I don't feel bad at all," said Mr. Padstow angrily, " I believe you know it. What I feel is annoyed."

" With me ? "

" With everything."

" That's liver," said Jane.

Mr. Padstow remembered Clare's remark about women liking men to be men and thought the moment had come to act on it.

"I insist on a plain answer to a plain question," he said.

Jane grinned a little at her cigarette and seemed to enjoy smoking it. Her hat suited her. In fact, reflected Mr. Padstow, everything she wore and everything she did suited her. Perhaps he had better temper firmness with kindness. Otherwise . . . .

"I only want to know who Wiggles is," he said. "I am quite prepared to accept him as one of your friends, and I hope you will bring him to Ashdown to lunch. But I suppose he has some other name ? "

"His name is Ambrose March," said Jane ; and blushed. It was infuriating. Never before had she blushed at the thought of Wiggles or at the sound of his name or at the idea of his coming ; but never before had there been anything illicit in the idea of his courtship.

"Mrs. Loudon says there was some foolish boy and girl attachment."

"Why foolish ? " interrupted Jane.

"Well—an affair that comes to nothing."

"Isn't Clare a cat ? " observed Jane to her cigarette. "A mischief-making cat ! "

"Then I may take it that on your side at any rate the affair is over ? "

"It might come on again when I see him in khaki," said Jane. "He's a captain now."

"You are not treating me well," said Mr. Padstow, and to his surprise Jane threw away her cigarette and faced him seriously.

"I know that," she said, "I've known it a long time. I'm sorry!"

"It would be all right if we were married. I'm sure it would."

"I'm not," said Jane. "I feel about a hundred years older than I did last summer and I'm a bit ashamed of myself."

"If you mean that you wish me to give you back your word I refuse to do it," said Mr. Padstow. "You promised to marry me, and I expect you to keep your engagement."

Jane made no answer, chiefly because to her own amazement, she could not have spoken just then without breaking down. Christian, coming back to the room saw at a glance that she had returned at an embarrassing moment; but she did not go away again, and soon after Mr. Padstow took a sulky departure without confirming his invitation to lunch.

"I didn't know it would be so horrid," said Jane.

"What has happened?" asked Christian.

"Nothing. He refuses to give me back my word."

"You can't marry two men, Jane."

"I know. What a simplification it would be if I could!"

"Ambrose is sure to ask you again. His visit means that."

"I can always say I'll be a sister to him. Or shall I be a sister to George?"

"Oliver said you would never marry George."

"He also said I should never marry Wiggles. I think I shall refuse them both for the duration. Then neither of them can complain. I'll soon settle George if he makes a fuss. He's like putty really."

"He is not the man for you," said Christian.

"I wish you'd tell him so."

"Whoever tells him, it will be unpleasant. You've not treated him well."

"So he says."

"Everyone will say so if you throw him over."

"I know what I'll do," said Jane. "I have an idea."

"I don't trust your ideas," said Christian.

"You'll like this one," said Jane.

XXXIII

THEY were both absurdly young but they did not feel young, they said to each other and to Christian. Ambrose had been in Flanders for more than a year and he was going back there in ten days. Before he went back he wanted to marry Jane as quickly as possible so that they could have a week together wherever Jane pleased. He had very thoughtfully procured a Special License in London and brought it with him. When Jane saw it she hardly knew whether to laugh or cry or be angry.

"I never said I would marry you," she protested. "I always vowed I would not."

"But I knew you would in the end," said Ambrose.

"I'm engaged to another man."

"We shall have to eat humble pie; at least you will."

"I hate treating anyone badly."

"You've got to treat one of us badly and it's not going to be me," said Ambrose. Certainly he had changed a bit, thought Jane; not essentially of course, but in manners and looks. He had always known very well what he wanted but he had not known how to get it. He had been tongue-tied and shy. He was not shy now. The difference between his wooing and

Mr. Padstow's ended the older man's chances once for all. Jane was led captive, but even at this crisis in her history did not completely lose the use of her tongue.

"It's very awkward," she explained, both to Christian and her lover. "I told George that I would not be married while we were at war and that it would take me three months to get my trousseau. He'll think I was making excuses."

"I'm afraid he'll think a good many things," said Christian; and turning to Ambrose she added: "We never approved of the engagement."

"It ought never to have been allowed," said he.

"It was not allowed," said Jane. "You are not allowed either. Oliver objects to both of you. He is very particular about his sister's marriage—naturally."

"I wish he was here," said Christian who took the situation more seriously than Jane did, and was a good deal troubled by some aspects of it.

"You'll feel better when I've broken the news to George, won't you?" said Jane and looked at the clock. They were waiting in the hall for the car which Ambrose was going to drive and it was the night of the Entertainment at the Pavilion; the one got up by Clare and other patriotic ladies of Granfield in aid of a Society for providing war horses with hats in summer.

The programme was long and various and was to begin with a series of Living Pictures in which Jane was taking part. When she was first asked by the promoters to take a part she had refused on the ground that she had no time; but a few days since she had paid a visit to Mrs. Sam Bluett, commandeered the sewing-room at Maniton and the maids who worked there

and, vowing them to secrecy, prepared the raiment she required. It now lay on the hall table in a large bundle with some other properties concealed in a rug. For Jane had refused to tell either Christian or Ambrose what part she was to play or who her coadjutors were to be. She had only said that her picture would be Symbolic.

"Symbolic of what?" asked Ambrose.

"Of my state of mind," said Jane; and Christian wondered what the girl's state of mind could be. She wished the evening was over and the disagreeable business of enlightening Mr. Padstow accomplished. Jane had promised that she would make an opportunity that night to tell him the truth; and that no one should be told yet of her forthcoming marriage.

"I quite agree with you," she said to Christian. "There must be 'an interval.' But of course the moment Wiggles appears with us everyone will know."

"Why should they? He is not our only friend in khaki."

"Well! You'll see," said Jane, and Christian thought she did see, and that probably Mr. Padstow saw too. For he sat next to her and turned glum when she entered the hall by herself.

"Where is Jane?" he asked.

"She has gone behind to get ready," said Christian.

"Ready for what?"

"She is appearing in one of the pictures."

"I thought she refused."

"She did; but she changed her mind."

"She is good at that, isn't she?"

"Yes," said Christian after a moment's troubled pause. "She is."

It was equivalent to telling him the truth, and Christian did it deliberately for Jane's sake as well as for his own. She did not want to say anything more just then and was glad that the orchestra began to play "Tipperary," after which the curtain went up on the first picture, which was of Clare in armour as St. George of England with about a dozen persons in khaki asleep at her feet.

"It was her own idea," commented Mr. Padstow. "She is appearing to the tired men in a dream and giving them courage. Like the Angels at Mons you know; only we didn't want to begin on angels. There would have had to be so many and the wings are troublesome. She makes a good St. George, doesn't she?"

Christian thought that Clare made a hateful and debased St. George, but did not say so. She would have put Oliver in that armour, or Ambrose March; both men with a man's bones and a man's spare features and keen eyes. Clare lowered the saint to her own level of feminine curves and feminine wiles. She came off much better as Delilah cutting off Samson's hair while he slept; and later as Salomé dancing before Herod. The same length of pink georgette served as a costume in both cases, Mr. Padstow explained to Christian, and said that Clare had shown great sense and economy in choosing her parts and dressing them.

"In fact one can hardly say that she is dressed at all," he pointed out. "She is so clever. She just buys a few yards of cheap stuff and drapes it. I hope people are not going to be at all shocked. I ventured to remind Mrs. Loudon that there would be a large audience to-night and that everyone would not have

received a classical education or travelled abroad where one gets used to pictures and statues practically without clothing. Travelling certainly does enlarge the mind. But Mrs. Loudon is so patriotic. She said she would appear as Lady Godiva if she thought it would make money for the dear war horses. She is even more interested in them than in our brave boys. I admire her spirit immensely. She says she never has a happy moment while her husband is away and that she would break down at once if she did not keep going."

"She certainly keeps going," said Christian and wondered in how many more pictures Clare had grabbed the pink georgette and the chief role. However she did not appear again in this first part of the programme. The curtain went up on Mrs. Sam Bluett as "The Lady with the Lamp" and then on Mr. Sam Bluett as "Sir Lancelot on his Couch" with a fair Elaine tending him, a scene chosen, said Mr. Padstow, for the sake of its subtle relation to scenes of the present day.

Christian thought "obvious" would have been a better word than "subtle," but again assented blandly to Mr. Padstow's glosses. That was ever the key-note of conversation with Mr. Padstow and perhaps the key-note to every kind of intercourse with him. He was not altogether damnable, but he was dull-witted and commonplace. However to-night she felt sorry for him because he had to be told that matrimonially he was not wanted after all; and the sting must needs lie in the 'after all.' The nearer Christian moved towards the uncomfortable moment the worse she felt about it; and the more she sympathised with the

about-to-be-discarded lover at her side. For it is not pleasant at any age to be taken and then dropped; but perhaps it is worst when the one taken is elderly and the one who drops is young. Christian wondered how Mr. Padstow would behave.

For the last time the curtain went up on a picture entitled "Penance" in the printed programme; and it was Jane who stood there as the central figure, her beautiful hair about her shoulders, lighted candles in her uplifted hands and the straight white folds of a garment presumably representing her shift, draping her. But it showed her neck, it fell away from her arms and it did not cover her pretty bare feet. In fact it was quite as becoming as the pink georgette had been to Clare and a murmur of applause rose in the hall when the audience saw the penitent whom, at first, it hardly recognised. To one side of her stood a gigantic figure in a long scarlet mantle, his face hidden by a black vizor and an executioner's axe in his hand. On the other side stood a priest with a bell and a book and well away at the back dimly lighted and half seen were some people in ruffs and doublets representing a crowd. The curtain had to go up upon this picture over and over again. The audience liked it best of all, no one quite knew why; and everyone badly wanted to know who was playing the part of the executioner. At the end of an interval when Jane with her hair up came into the hall followed by Ambrose March she was as much stared at as if she had been a bride; and when everything was over and she stood near Mr. Padstow in the crush waiting for the Maniton car he asked her what her idea had been and why she had suddenly added her picture to a completed programme.

" Come and see me early to-morrow morning and I'll tell you," she said. She had managed to get a yard or two away from Christian and into a corner where with a departing inattentive crowd surging past them they could talk unheard.

" I'll come in the afternoon," said Mr. Padstow, " I shall be busy in the morning."

" Put off your business. I want to see you," said Jane.

" Why won't the afternoon do ? "

" I shall be gone."

" Gone ! Where are you going ? "

" To London, for a week."

" Is Mrs. Hawke going ? "

" No. She expects Oliver home on leave any moment. We may find him at Maniton when we get back. She had a wire this morning. Life is very jumpy at present, isn't it ? "

" I don't find it jumpy. I find it annoying. I don't understand this sudden journey to London."

" I know you don't," said Jane with conviction, " that is why I want you to come to-morrow morning—to have it explained."

" You said you wanted to explain the picture."

" They hang together."

" I hate riddles," said Mr. Padstow testily. " Can't you speak plainly without all this rigmarole ? "

" Yes," said Jane. " I can. I promised Christian I would. But it doesn't seem to me quite fair to do it here all in a hurry and in a crowd. It doesn't give you a chance to hit back."

" Go on," said Mr. Padstow.

But for a moment Jane did not go on. Her usual

fluency deserted her, her lips trembled and she turned her head from the man beside her as if she felt ashamed to meet his eyes.

"You needn't go on," he said. "I can guess. In fact I've seen it coming for some time. No doubt I was a fool—— "

"No—no," said Jane. "I've behaved badly—— "

"There is no doubt about that," said Mr. Padstow; and he walked away.

XXXIV

Mr. Padstow thought things over and decided that he would go over to Maniton next day and have a further explanation from Jane. He had not said any of the things he wanted to say and he had spent a feverish night saying them to himself; so that his reproaches and his arguments were in array, ready for expression. He cherished a faint hope of persuading Jane to reconsider the situation, in her own interests; but he realised that he would have to be tactful. Like most socially clumsy people he prided himself on his tact, and in exercising it had often published what should have been hidden and added fuel to flames. However he was very anxious to succeed this time and ready to agree to anything except a rupture. Perhaps he could dazzle Jane. It seemed impossible that she should want to jilt him for a penniless young subaltern; and yet everything pointed that way. Women were unaccountable creatures; mercenary and spendthrift one minute; ready to beggar themselves the next. Jane had certainly liked the idea of being a rich woman a year ago; but now that she was older and more sensible she seemed to care less about money than she had done as a child. However he was not going to be sent about his business without more ado

than had been made last night. If he was to be thrown over she should hear what he thought of her.

It was in this frame of mind that Mr. Padstow arrived at Maniton in his car, and he arrived at the heels of a taxi from which Oliver descended. The two men entered the house together without ringing and Oliver putting down the kit-bag he carried, led the way into the drawing-room. No one seemed to be about.

" Perhaps they are in the garden," said Oliver going towards the window ; and then, coming back to the fireplace, he rang the bell. " Wickham is getting old and deaf. I suppose he didn't hear the car."

" Do they expect you ? " asked Mr. Padstow.

" Yes. I wired from Havre yesterday. I've been travelling fifty hours."

He looked like it, thought Mr. Padstow. He looked worn and tired ; and yet he looked other things too. He had the fresh colour of a man who has lived a long time in the open air ; the hard muscles of his training and of five months in the field ; and the hungry eyes of the exile hurrying home after long absence and shortly forced to go again.

No one came in answer to the bell.

" Sometimes they are in the dining-room," said Mr. Padstow, " cutting out clothes."

" Cutting out clothes ! "

" For the hospital, you know. Mrs. Hawke is such a hard worker."

" Is she ? "

" They both are—in different ways."

Mr. Padstow sighed heavily and walked beside Oliver across the silent hall towards the dining-room.

" Perhaps I ought to tell you," he went on, " I'm

here on a most uncomfortable errand. Shall we sit down a moment before we open the door ? "

Oliver sat down at Mr. Padstow's invitation. The house was as silent as if no one was in it and he began to wonder what had happened or was happening. He could see that Mr. Padstow was in a state of excitement and anxiety so that he hardly knew what he said or did. His face was twitching and his eyes seemed to bulge more than usual.

" Jane is treating me abominably," he said.

" I'm sorry to hear it," said Oliver.

" For more than a year she has kept me dangling."

" I should have refused to dangle."

" What good would that have been ? She would have let me go."

" Then I should have gone."

" But I don't want to go," cried Mr. Padstow, his voice reaching a falsetto expressive of his emotion. " I want Jane, and, as she gave me her word more than a year ago, I consider that I have rights."

" No doubt," said Oliver. " But what is the matter ? "

" Last night she dressed herself in a sheet, at least it was flimsier than a sheet, and she had lighted candles in her hands and when it was all over she told me she had changed her mind and walked off. But I consider that she owes me an explanation. I'm here to demand it."

" I should like an explanation myself," said Oliver and was told with slightly more coherence about the part Jane had played last night and her subsequent infamous behaviour.

" Infamous is a strong word to use, but I use it," said Mr. Padstow. " Who is this Mr.—er—Wiggles ? "

Oliver did not whistle, but he looked as if he would like to and he got up.

" Wiggles ! " he said. " Is Wiggles in it ? "

" He is very much in it," groused Mr. Padstow. " He is staying in this house. He is home on leave. Heaven knows what is happening."

Oliver went to the dining-room door and opened it wide. Mr. Padstow had followed him and they stood together in the doorway silently. The table was laid for lunch and laid for three people only ; but the lunch was not an everyday one ; nor were the flowers every dayish. They were all white, they were in great profusion and they were set off by maidenhair fern. In fact they were bridal. The food talked too. Salmon mayonnaise, chicken in aspic, meringues, peaches and grapes ! Champagne glasses and on the sideboard a bottle of champagne !

" H—m ! " said Oliver, " We shall want two more places and a magnum."

But Mr. Padstow did not attend to him. From the beginning he had fixed his eyes on a large two-tiered iced cake in the centre of the table, and he now pointed a denunciatory finger at it.

" That's a wedding-cake," he said.

Oliver could not deny it.

" At this moment they are getting married."

Oliver thought it most likely.

" You and I are both being fooled."

Oliver fiddled with the bottle of champagne, cut the wire and got out the cork with a pop. The wine fizzed over into a glass on the table.

" I'm tired to death and hungry and thirsty," he said. " Let's have lunch."

Mr. Padstow hesitated ; although he was hungry and thirsty too.

" Isn't it a pity to upset the table ? " he suggested. " It isn't laid for you and me."

" No," said Oliver, and hesitated too. Then he sat down. " It's my table," he pointed out.

" I suppose we ought to talk things over," said Mr. Padstow, and accepted a plateful of salmon mayonnaise. " If this marriage has taken place what are we going to do about it ? "

" What can we do except drink to them ? " said Oliver refilling Mr. Padstow's glass and his own. " I'm not going to make them miserable. They'll have a day or two together and then—— "

" That's it," said Mr. Padstow inadequately and turned silent.

" But you'll admit that I've been badly treated," he observed after a time when the mayonnaise on his plate was finished, and he had cut himself some slices of ham at a side-table.

" Rather," said Oliver. There was no champagne left in the bottle now and both men felt in a more kindly frame of mind than they had done half an hour ago. Oliver was so tired that he felt sleepy, and his sympathy with Mr. Padstow was less alive perhaps than it should have been. However he felt mildly sorry for the disappointed man and by way of cheering him up began telling one or two stories of the trenches that obliged him to raise his voice and roused Mr. Padstow to laughter. In fact they were making a certain amount of noise so that they were heard in the hall when Christian came back with Ambrose and Jane. The three of them made a rush for the dining-room

door and they were joined immediately by Wickham who had not answered Oliver's bell because he had been to the village church with the other servants and thrown rice at Ambrose and Jane. He looked rather startled when he saw his master and Mr. Padstow sitting at the disordered table, but agreed with Mrs. Stoughton's successor that they were living in stirring times when things did happen unexpected-like.

"Do you know that you've both been eating my wedding-breakfast?" said Jane indignantly, and it was in this way that she confirmed Mr. Padstow's suspicions and announced her marriage to her brother. But neither of the men who had a right to rebuke her did so. She was to have the inside of a week with her bridegroom, she told them, and then she was coming back to live at Maniton as usual.

"That is if you are willing, sir," said Ambrose to Oliver. "Otherwise I'm able to provide for my wife——"

Jane who was just about to cut the cake stopped with the knife in mid air:

"What a shock you gave me, Wiggles!" she cried. "Your wife! Nonsense! I'm Jane; and of course I'm coming back here. Christian is Maniton now and she wants me."

Oliver looked across the table at his wife whom he had not seen for six months.

"My battalion is ordered to Mespot," he said.

Christian did not take it in immediately. The sudden march of events and the hurry and flurry of the last two days amazed her. She wanted to send off the bride and bridegroom cheerfully, and must see that they took their kit with them. She wanted to appease

Mr. Padstow whose presence at the wedding feast puzzled her, and she longed for everyone to go so that she could at last be alone with Oliver. She did not know yet whether he would blame her for conniving at his sister's sudden marriage ; and if he went to Mespot what would it mean, and when would she see him again ?

" I could not have stopped the marriage," she said when at last she was with her husband in her room.

" Did you want to ? "

" No. I approve of it."

" Though I disapprove ? "

" Yes. I believe in Ambrose."

" Do you dare to set your opinion against mine ? "

He had her hands in his now and was looking at her, she told him, as if he wanted to make a mouthful of her.

" Oh yes ! I dare many things now-a-days," she said with a sigh. " I'm giving them some of my money."

" What do you mean ? "

" I'm allowing Jane two hundred a year."

" That's my business."

" Yes. It is ; but you were away."

" Things can be arranged by post. They must be when I go to Mespot. I may be away a long time."

" How long ? "

" Heaven knows ! "

It was unbearable ; and it had to be borne ; with a stiff lip too ; so that the man should go about his work in faith and courage.

" I'm getting on very well you know," said Christian. " You needn't worry ! "

XXXV

OLIVER recognised that Christian had grown up a good deal during his absence, but even now he only half liked the idea of leaving her alone with Jane at Maniton. So he suggested giving Miss Millet another trial, for she had left Mr. Padstow's aunt and was looking for a haven again.

"I'm sorry for her, but I cannot have her here," said Christian, "even to please you."

Oliver was dressing for dinner with the door leading into his wife's room wide open and he now stood in the doorway watching her. She sat at her toilet table nearly ready but not quite; and because Clare and Mr. Cockshott were coming she had put on a black satin frock that was very becoming but added years to her age.

"You seem to know your own mind," he said dryly.

"I do."

He went back into his room and got into his coat. Then he appeared in the doorway again and found that Christian was about to go down.

"What do you and Jane think of Cockshott?" he said.

"Not much."

"Have you had much to do with him?"

"Very little. I've left it to Jane."

" I'm satisfied with the way the place is being run."

" Jane is capable, and so are some of your men."

Oliver looked as if he had more to say, but at the moment he could not say it because Christian did not give him the chance. She had opened her door and gone into the passage just as Clare arrived upstairs in her evening cloak ; and when Clare saw Oliver she flung herself upon his shirt-front with cries of welcome that chilled him to the bone.

" Darling Oliver ! " she exclaimed. " You don't mind my calling him darling, do you, Christian ? "

" Not in the least," said Christian, her eyes alight with laughter ; for Oliver stood there embarrassed and unbending in the arms of a lady who stood on tiptoe to kiss him but could not reach his chin.

" I'm looking forward to the evening so much," babbled Clare. " I want to hear all your adventures and all about Jane's marriage. I suppose you came home for it. I'm rather hurt really at not being asked as I'm one of the family, but Jane never understood me. Luckily I've a forgiving disposition or I might not have come to-night. I've had poor dear Mr. Padstow with me all the afternoon. He talked of going away for a time but I've persuaded him out of it. I'm sure his friends will rally round him. I would have him at Highwood for the winter if John would consent to it ; but you know what John is. Besides, there is Jane. Where will she live now ? "

" She will live here," said Christian.

" You and Oliver do approve of her marriage then ! I heard that Oliver was furious but that you egged it on. People will say anything won't they ? It is a pity she didn't break off with Mr. Padstow first. It isn't

usual to marry one man while you are engaged to another even when there is a war on. But Jane was always original. Of course we know now why she acted in that picture the other night. It was her idea of a public apology. But her costume was rather daring for a penitent, wasn't it ? You ought to have been there, Oliver."

" I seem to have missed a great deal," said Oliver and then got away to the drawing-room where he found Mr. Cockshott examining the pictures with his usual air of finding his surroundings behind his ideas. Oliver did not like him much but knew of no one to replace him and, as he had told Christian, was satisfied with the way the place had been run. He had asked him to dinner on the spur of the moment and without any idea that Clare would make herself disagreeable to him. He had not thought that Clare would make herself disagreeable to any male, but if he had said so to her she would have replied that he had not sounded the depths of her patriotism. According to Clare no one did ; not even John. He had cut up rough on his last leave because he heard of her walking up and down the High Street with white feathers that she offered to errand boys and young men serving in shops ; but then John was not really patriotic. He damned the war and complained of the mud and the cold in Flanders ; for he was out there now and had just got his promotion and the D.S.O. Promotion meant extra pay, but not much of it reached Clare, she said. Men were so selfish.

Dinner proceeded calmly. Wickham was in and out of the room and the talk was general. Christian told little stories about the Belgians, Oliver seemed to like

the idea of a hot climate again and Mr. Cockshott said he had inside knowledge that the war would be over by Christmas.

" John doesn't think so," said Clare. " His most intimate friend is General—well, I mustn't say his name because it would be betraying a confidence—but the General expects to be in France another ten years. In fact he is certain of it."

" I don't suppose anyone knows," said Christian. " Have some marrons glacés, Clare. Oliver sent them from Paris."

" I've told John not to send me things," said Clare taking two of the largest chestnuts. " I can't resist these when I see them, but I don't think we ought to allow ourselves luxuries while the men we have given are in muddy trenches. When are you going to join up, Mr. Cockshott ? "

The attack was delivered so suddenly that in spite of his usual assurance the young man got red and stammered.

" I consider that I'm working for my country at home," he said.

" You'll be fetched before long," said she. " The General told John so. Conscription is coming and all conscripts, officers and men, will have a large C. on their tunics. Quite right. They'll get no pay to speak of either."

" Have some port, Clare," said Oliver thinking to stem this tide of information, but Clare was not so easily baffled. On the authority of the anonymous General she continued to abash and scarify Mr. Cockshott ; and no one knew whether she believed the stuff she talked or invented it as she went along. Her mind

was so fluid that perhaps she invented and believed too ; like a child. But she had gleams of shrewdness too.

" I detest that young man," she said to Christian as they sat by themselves after dinner. " Why don't you make Oliver get rid of him ? "

" Oliver is satisfied with him."

" You are not."

" I've not much to go on."

Clare was sitting on the fender seat hugging the fire but holding a hand screen between the heat of it and her face.

" You should stand up to Oliver as I do to John," she said complacently. " Men get tired of a tame woman. They like a little friction."

The two men came in before Christian could reply ; but she had not wanted to reply. It was just like Clare to take for granted one moment that her relations with John were all that could be wished ; and the next moment to relate long histories of their insurmountable differences ; and it was just like her to give her step-sister advice that was not asked and a label that did not fit. But Christian never quarrelled with Clare. She had ceased to take her seriously. Yet she remembered the label next day when Oliver was giving her instructions about the conduct of affairs during his absence. She did not feel ' tame ' as she listened to him and took note of his wishes. She felt as she imagined a knight used to when he heard the terms of his quest ; or a modern soldier when he was trusted with a job. She ardently desired to acquit herself well, to earn his approval and as far as possible to take his place. She could not have desires of her own that

conflicted with her intention of serving him faithfully; but she would gladly have accepted more authority than he would delegate to her.

"I wish you would have trusted Jane and me and your old servants to see to everything," she said, "I believe we could have done it. I'm not much good at accounts but Jane is."

"Jane is married."

"Only for a week. She is coming back here."

"She may not stay."

Christian looked rather startled.

"He can't take her to France with him," she said. "I'm sure Jane means to stay here till you come back."

"Well—we're all in the melting-pot. I'm sorry you don't like Cockshott better, but as long as he does his work and saves you—— "

"I don't want to be saved. I want to work from morning till night for you."

Oliver went away with the memory of her as she said that to him, and the memory glowed. She had no idea herself what she looked like when she was stirred to the depths; how her eyes gave him her heart and the very poise of her body became sentient and alive. But he made her happy by his response to her endeavours.

"You've done very well," he said as he left her. "Take care of yourself till I come back."

XXXVI

AMBROSE MARCH proved to be more inconsiderate as a husband than either Christian or Jane expected. He was severely wounded in France, got patched up, was put in charge of stores at Arquata Scrivia in Italy and arranged for his wife to join him there.

"I never heard of such a thing," said Jane when she got his directions about her passport and the journey. "As if I could leave you and Maniton!"

"You'll learn Italian," said Christian. "You'll see Italy. I wonder how long you'll be there?"

"Am I going?"

"Of course you are. Do you think if Oliver sent for me——"

"Wiggles takes too much on himself," said Jane looking at her husband's letter again. "Just because I married him for a week, to oblige him, he thinks I'm at his beck and call. I've a good mind not to go."

"You must go," said Christian. "I shall be all right."

So Jane went, half unwillingly and Christian was

left at Maniton alone. She knew that Oliver had been a prisoner in the hands of the Turks since the surrender of Kut, but from week to week she hardly knew whether he was alive or dead. Once in a while she would get a letter from him, but she knew from the contents of the few that reached her that many he sent never arrived. She wrote to him regularly but felt sure that he hardly ever received a mail. In July 1916 her child was born and was a girl. She called it Olivia and wished it had been a boy. What good were girls in a world ravaged from end to end by fighting men? Besides the baby looked like her, people said, and had her eyes. If it had been a boy, with Oliver's eyes she could have looked at them instead of at the image in her heart that both sustained and tortured her. She missed her husband, she wanted him, she lived for him and worked for him amidst a silence. If he never came back there would be the girl in his place, the girl who should have been a boy. Jane had a son and had called him Christian. She was still in Italy.

From the time of her departure till the autumn of 1916 there was no one at Maniton to look after Mr. Cockshott. Christian was not well enough either before Olivia's birth or for some ten weeks after. In fact she had a narrow squeak for life, did not rally as a young woman should and when the baby was a month old had to obey doctor's orders and go away for rest and change of air. She went to Whitby for six weeks with the Favershams and came back ready for anything, even for the inevitable tussle with Mr. Cockshott. She had known all the while it must come. The thought of his mismanagement had irked her while she

was ill and unable to interfere much. Now that she was well she saw signs of it everywhere. He set the work-people by the ears, he gave ignorant orders, he began expensive improvements for which there was no justification in war time and he refused the cottagers privileges they regarded as immemorial rights. Christian found the whole place in an uproar over the sudden arbitrary eviction of the Masons, an elderly childless couple who had lived on the estate all their lives. The man had been born in the little thatched cottage they inhabited and his wife was of Maniton too and distantly related to Wickham. He presented the case to his mistress on her return.

" The Masons are leaving to-morrow, m'm," he said to her at dinner a day or two after she got home.

" The Masons ! Why should they leave ? "

" Mr. Cockshott has turned them out, m'm."

" What for ? "

" He says they picked up sticks in the wood, m'm."

" Why shouldn't they pick up sticks ? "

" Mr. Cockshott doesn't allow it. He has issued an order, m'm, that no one may pick up sticks in the woods or cut a bit o' furze on the commons. He met Mrs. Mason with a bundle of twigs and was very sharp with her. In fact he knocked them out of her hands and she went crying to Mason like a silly woman and he had a few words next day with Mr. Cockshott. I daresay Mason will find work in Granfield ; but he's lived in that cottage all his life and his father before him. If you could speak a word to Mr. Cockshott . . . Mason is a useful man in the woods."

Christian pushed back her chair and got up from the table.

" I'll certainly speak a word to Mr. Cockshott," she said. " Send someone over at once and say I wish to see him to-night ; and just let the Masons know they are to do nothing till they hear from me."

" Lor ! " said Wickham to the new cook, describing his efforts on behalf of his kinswoman, " She's not going to be afraid of Cockshott ; no more than a knife would be afraid of a puff ball. There's race in her. I've seen her colour and be ready to cry if the master had a look on his face that troubled her, but she won't stand any nonsense from anyone else. She came here a child but she's not so much of a child now."

" She strikes me as a very capable young lady," said the cook.

Mr. Cockshott, on the contrary, hardly expected to have much trouble with Christian. He did not like her, chiefly because she held aloof from him ; but hitherto he had not dealt with her directly. Jane had fought him tooth and nail and had usually got her way by sheer force of the facts that she understood better than he did ; and the allegiance of the old servants who would carry out her orders and pretend to misunderstand his. He had been astute enough to give in with a good grace on some occasions and to consult her on others. It was not till Jane left that he ran riot.

" Good-evening Mr. Cockshott," said Christian when the young man came into the room. " I sent for you to-night because I understand that the Masons are leaving their cottage to-morrow."

It was going to be war. Mr. Cockshott saw that in the lady's eye and heard it in her glacial voice the moment he came into the room. He had come in an

after dinner mood, rather flattered by the sudden summons, not scenting disaster. For was he not virtually master of Maniton, the only support of its mistress, her ally and her adviser. Now that the odious Jane had gone Christian would be driven to lean on him and would discover his qualities. Oliver was lost to his wife and his home ; might die out there ; at any rate could give no orders. He hardly counted with Mr. Cockshott.

" Yes," he said sitting down, " the Masons are leaving, I'm glad to say. They are troublesome people."

" In what way ? Mason knows his work and does it. I've often heard Mr. Hawke say so."

" Well, it's like this, Mrs. Hawke," said Mr. Cockshott crossing his legs and posing in an easy attitude in his chair. " Either I run the place for you to the best of my abilities or—— "

" Or you don't run it. Is that what you wanted to say ? " inquired Christian.

" Er—yes. If I give an order about sticks and furze I have my reasons."

" What are your reasons ? "

" I must make myself felt, Mrs. Hawke. If I'm to do myself and you justice, I must make myself felt. In theory I don't hold with private property at all, but the individual can't set himself against the system and as I've been put here at the head of things—— "

" In my husband's absence I'm at the head of things," said Christian.

They stared at each other. At least Mr. Cockshott stared and Christian sustained his gaze in an unmoved way that he found upsetting.

" I was not aware that I was acting under you," he said in an offended voice.

" But you know now," said Christian.

" Well really—I'm not sure—if I'm to do myself justice—your husband left the property in my hands—he placed no restrictions on my activities."

" He did not forsee that your activities would be so disastrous. I can't have our old servants insulted and evicted by you. The families living at Maniton have always picked up sticks and cut what furze they wanted and my husband would be indignant if he heard that you had tried to stop them. Nor would he allow the Masons to go. I shall be much obliged if you will tell them there has been a misunderstanding and that Mason can keep on with his work and his cottage."

" Really, Mrs. Hawke. I don't know—— "

" I thought you would rather do it yourself."

" I don't half like it."

" Very well," said Christian getting up with an air of dismissal. " I'll see them."

" I consider it unfair to undermine my authority in this way."

" You have brought that on yourself."

It was most annoying. There is nothing more annoying than a sudden change for the worse in a situation that should have been pleasant and profitable. Christian was a lonely woman. Mr. Cockshott did not lose sight of that even while she took his breath away with her unexpected assumptions. He had thought her amenable and easily persuaded ; at any rate compared with Jane. He knew that she was not country bred and for two years she had hardly interfered with the management of the estate. She had left every-

thing to the old servants and to Jane ; and during this summer, while she was ill, to Mr. Cockshott. He had taken for granted that she would go on as she had begun. The drawing-room was her proper place ; not the woods and the commons.

" I suppose I shall have to tell Mason that you have pleaded with me for him," he suggested.

" You can put it in that way, if you like," said Christian.

XXXVII

ABOUT a week later Wickham came in to Christian's room with a message from Enoch Trim, an old man who had worked for Oliver's father and was of opinion that without him Maniton would stop going altogether as a clock does when not wound up. He was a stone mason by trade, farmed a little on his own account, was clever with cows and horses, mended roads, built walls, did anything and everything asked of him ; provided you treated him as one gentleman does another ; which the Hawkes, male and female, had always done. But that there Cockshott !

" I spews him out," said Enoch Trim.

Christian knew him well and his quiet dignified wife who kept her cottage ' so as you could eat off the floor ' said Enoch ; as if anyone but a dog or cat ever wanted to eat off the floor, said Jane, sympathising with him ; for though he was the variety man of Maniton all varieties of work sent him home mucky, a personal condition his wife owned she could not abide. But they were a devoted couple and Maniton belonged to them. You can imagine then what Christian's feelings were when the old man walked into her room and in a voice shaking with fury gave her a week's notice.

" Sit down, Enoch," she said. "What's the matter ? "

" I weant put up with it," he said. " I've worked here all my days and I've never seen nothun like it. Such goings on ! "

" What has happened ? "

" I weant be a servant's servant, I tell ye straight Ma'am. I weant do it. If young Steve knows such a sight more about a hedge than what I do let un build it. That's what I'd say. Let un build it. Sends me a message—— "

The old man's indignation impeded his speech for a moment and while he swallowed and looked as if he was about to break down Christian tried to piece his story together. Young Steve was a boy of sixteen who carried pails and stones for Enoch and mixed his mortar. A new granite wall or hedge was being built round one of the new cottages ; and of course Enoch had it in hand. That was his job. Where granite and granite hedges were in question he was like the Master of Balliol. Whatever could be known he knew it.

" What was the message ? " asked Christian.

" Put un across my knee and spank un, I will," proceeded Enoch who now that he had recovered his breath was not going to be hurried. " Impident toad ! Comes up to me and sez we aren't agoin' to build this hedge with a foundation ! Oh ! aren't we ? sez I. You get to yer work, my lad, and do a bit with that piggle. It ain't necessary, sez he, Mr. Cockshott."

The old man stopped and choked again.

" Wants me to build my hedge without a foundation," he burst out directly. " Mr. Cockshott says a foundation ain't necessary and I'm wasting time and money. Mr. Cockshott ! I wish the hedge would

topple down on un. It will on someone if it's built his way. That's all, Ma'am."

"It won't be built his way," said Christian.

"It weant be built by me at all, Mrs. Hawke. I weant do a fool's job like that to please Mr. Cockshott. Look at that new road he's had made. Look at it!"

"I can't see that it was wanted," said Christian.

"It is not wanted. There's no sense in a new road through those woods. It don't save five minutes over the old one and it's that near the cliff in places that it's dangerous and it's cost—have you any idea what it cost ma'am?"

"I have not," said Christian.

"Well—I'm sorry for Mr. Hawke," said Enoch, "and I hope the Turks are treating him fairer than them he puts his trust in at home. That's all, ma'am."

But it wasn't all by any means. Again Christian had to send for Mr. Cockshott and explain to him that the Trims belonged to Maniton, that if Enoch said the hedge must have a foundation it would have one and that, in Oliver's absence, the Trims could not be allowed to go.

"May I ask whether you as a Londoner know much about granite hedges?" the young man asked. He certainly was an insufferable young man, thought Christian. His very voice irritated her. It had a complacent swagger that set her on edge and hardened her against him.

"I know as little as you do," she answered. "That is why I wish Enoch to build this one his own way. He is the best stonemason in the district."

"I was thinking of letting someone else build the new pig-styes," said Mr. Cockshott.

"What new pig-styes?"

"I'm arranging to have some built. Ours are old-fashioned."

"They will serve until my husband comes home," said Christian.

Never again, if he could help it, would he undertake work that involved dealing with a woman, thought Mr. Cockshott. One as young and pretty as Mrs. Hawke ought to be busy with her clothes and her mirror and her friends. What had she to do with pig-styes and obstinate old peasants? and how far dared he defy her? If her husband died abroad she would probably be paramount at Maniton either for life or until Olivia came of age. But the present situation might continue. Oliver, a shadow of authority, he himself thwarted and made ridiculous, Christian interfering here, there and everywhere. She had begun to inquire into expenses and had even said she would look at the books. She was worse than Jane. That new cliff road had been an expensive blunder. He was ready to admit it. But he was fresh to the work and allowed himself a margin for mistakes. The cost came out of Oliver's pocket, but that could not be helped. On thinking it over he decided to assert himself on the first opportunity. She would hardly venture to oust him since her husband had put him there. In fact she might knock under next time they were in conflict. One never knew with women. He had not expected to have any trouble at Maniton, but until now he had not been at odds with Christian or dreamed that she could show herself so tough and disagreeable. He did not want to quarrel with her but he must try to put her in her place; which out of doors was not above his.

Unfortunately he went the wrong way about it. No

one can expect a young man who has grown up in a town to know much about the effect of yew on cows ; but Mr. Cockshott made the mistake of thinking that people bred in towns know all there is to know and that country folk, being manifestly ' bovine ' are in all things ignorant and stupid. He thought his slick smartness could deal with every situation and that the knowledge handed down through generations was not knowledge at all but foolishness. Enoch Trim he hated because Enoch had got the better of him in the matter of the hedge and had had the laugh of him ever since. So when Enoch said the cows ought to be kept out of the pasture bordered by a yew hedge, Mr. Cockshott ordered Steve to leave the gates open and let the cows through if they wished to go. It was well known that animals did not eat what hurt them, being in this way wiser than human beings. Unhappily for the Maniton cows Enoch did not hear of the order and at the time was busy with his own threshing. He did not hear of it until Oliver's valuable cows began to sicken and die. Then he went to see Christian again and as a result of his visit Christian went to see Mr. Bluett. Sam, his son, was in France ; but his father who had retired before the war was now in his office again and in Christian's opinion a better man than his son. At any rate he assured her that Mr. Cockshott could be dismissed and he seemed surprised that the young man had been endured all this time at Maniton. Christian explained that Jane had done a great deal for the place till she went to Italy.

" You will want someone else ? " suggested Mr. Bluett.

" No," said Christian. " I mean to see what I can

do myself. Several of the older men have been on the property since they were boys and with their help—— "

" Quite right. Quite right," said Mr. Bluett. " You'll do very well, I'm sure. Women are showing us what they are made of. Now would you like us to see Cockshott for you ? He'll probably be disagreeable."

" No," said Christian, " I'll see him myself the moment I get home."

Mr. Bluett looked at her with admiration. In appearance she was what he reckoned a woman should be ; rather small and slender, with a delicate colour and beautiful steady eyes. She was well groomed too and had a bunch of Parma violets in her coat. No doubt the women who bounced about in uniform were doing necessary work ; but it was rather restful to meet a young one who wore ordinary clothes and was not dying to get out to France. He liked her grit and her composure ; and he wondered whether Oliver knew that he had a wife who was above rubies.

" Do you hear regularly ? " he asked.

Christian shook her head.

" Hardly ever," she said ; and got away as quickly as she could. It was one of the days when she wanted Oliver so much that life did not seem worth while without him. The affair of the cows, the interview with Enoch and Mr. Bluett, and the prospect of an unpleasant one with Mr. Cockshott, all strained her nerve. She would do what she had to do, but behind her composure she felt weary ; not discouraged. She was going on with her head high as long as Oliver was alive and might some day come home. However interminable the lane, there was still that thought and hope at the end of it.

So she faced Mr. Cockshott and said what she had to say in the fewest possible words ; and when he made himself disagreeable met his bluster with her flag flying. He would not take his dismissal from anyone but Mr. Hawke he said at first. She referred him to Mr. Bluett. She was acting with flagrant disregard of her husband's wishes. She made no answer to that. He would telegraph to Mr. Hawke for instructions. She looked at him and said he could try. Who was going to be at the head of things ? Had she anyone else in view ? Of course if she was not satisfied—— The lady's steady eyes upset him. He became incoherent and almost maudlin.

" I'm sorry, Mr. Cockshott, but I am not satisfied," said Christian plainly. " Mr. Bluett will arrange about your salary and we shall be glad to meet you in that way. He will examine your accounts too and report to me on them. I think that is all there is to say."

" I suppose I had better go at once then," said Mr. Cockshott sulkily. " I'm not inclined to hang about here under notice."

" I'm glad to hear it," said Christian. " It would be uncomfortable for everyone."

XXXVIII

A BIRTHDAY party was in progress on the verandah at Maniton ; and three candles were burning on the birthday cake. Olivia and Chris, her cousin, had a little table to themselves, but they could see the candles and the cake on one of the bigger tables and were not as much interested in bread and butter as they should have been. Olivia's nurse was present and attending to them because Christian had various grown-up people there as well as the two children. Ambrose and Jane had run over for a short holiday but were soon returning to Italy. Colonel Loudon and Clare had both come by invitation, and Mr. Padstow had arrived uninvited because he had remembered the date of Olivia's birthday and brought her a large expensive doll.

It was nine months since the armistice terms had been signed, but Oliver was not back yet. It was going on for four years since Christian had seen him and during those years she had been in constant anxiety about him. At times she had not known whether he was alive or dead, and she had rarely known whether he was well or ill or in what way he had been treated. Lately she knew he had been invalided to Bombay and was therefore no longer in the hands of the Turks. But so few letters had come through from him that his condition and his ideas seemed to be as hidden from her as if he had died.

Oliver, who had suffered much bodily and spiritual discomfort, did not realise either what the long separation had done for his wife or what it had cost her. He thought of her as living in comfort, missing him, but perhaps liking the freedom the war brought to women left alone. He had not heard of the birth of his child. When, at last, he was sent home he did not tell her he was coming. He was weary with travelling and in a state of mental apathy on his arrival in London. He spent a day and a night, and then a day again there, most of the time asleep. He neither wrote nor telegraphed to Christian. It came into his mind that he would take her by surprise and see what had happened to her after all these years. Perhaps his home-coming would be flat and disappointing. Perhaps everyone had got on well without him. As he turned in at his own gates he thought the place looked more prosperous than he had ever seen it, and that was unexpected. New trees had been planted, wheat was ripening in a large field east of the drive where wheat had never grown in his time, the house itself had just been freshly painted, and what he could see of the garden was well kept. He paid his taxi, took his suit case in his hand and walked in unannounced as he had done years ago on what proved to be Jane's wedding-day.

But this time the house was not uncannily silent. As he set down his suit case he heard voices and when he opened the drawing-room door he could see that people were at tea on the verandah. But before he went forward he looked at the room. This was one thing his wife had done in his absence then—distempered the walls a pale primrose, banished most of

the pictures, covered chairs and Chesterfield with a cretonne . . . did he hate it ? . . . did he like it ? . . . Anyhow it was new, and so was the Persian carpet. He liked that, and when he came to look at it thought he had seen it before in an upstairs room. But he could not stop now over curtains and carpets. For a moment he stood hidden by a curtain looking at the people on the balcony ; looking at Christian, looking at the two children. He must pull himself together before he went forward. Damned weak and ill he felt and no doubt looked it. Christian ! She had changed. So had Jane. But Jane seemed to be as capable and alive as ever. She got up as he stood there unseen, she came quietly towards him, and just as things were turning queer she caught him by the arm and helped him into a chair.

" I'm all right," he said speaking with difficulty, and shut his eyes. He opened them again when he felt something at his lips and heard a voice a long way off telling him to drink. It was Jane administering brandy.

" I'm all right," he said again. " Only a bit tired and knocked about. Who are those children ? "

" The girl is yours," said Jane. " Didn't you know?"

" No," said Oliver. The brandy did him good but he still felt queer. He wanted to see Christian who had changed, and the little girl with Christian's eyes. His child ! He tried to get up, but as he did so Christian came in and saw him. Jane went away.

* * * * * * *

A week later Oliver was so nearly all right that he could sit in his office with Christian and talk over things with her. He was not strong yet but he was getting

stronger every day, and he wanted to know what had happened at Maniton in his absence. He had discovered that the place was prosperous ; more prosperous in war than it had ever been in peace. The books showed him that and so did his banking account.

" I put everything I could into War Loan," Christian had just said. " That seemed the best thing to do since I could not consult you."

" But why have you kept the books ? " asked Oliver. " I got your letter telling me about Cockshott, and I wrote at once advising you to find another agent."

" I've been your agent," said Christian.

" You ! "

" Yes. I had Enoch Trim and some of the others with me."

" But I told you to engage an agent."

" Did you ? I don't think I got the letter. But anyhow I'd made up my mind to do without one. I really could not sit still and see our affairs mismanaged again."

" So you've been master of Maniton."

" No," said Christian quickly. " Viceroy."

They were interrupted by the telephone bell and both husband and wife made a movement to answer it ; but Christian sat down again when she saw Oliver on his feet.

" It's something about raspberries," he said in a moment.

" Let me come," said Christian, and took the receiver from his hand. From the one-sided observations that Oliver could hear he made out that the price of raspberries had risen and that Maniton was going to sell at the top of the market.

"I never sold raspberries," said Oliver rather scandalised

"I sell everything we don't use," said Christian. "I'm going to make——" She stopped suddenly.

"Go on," said Oliver.

"Apples!" said Christian. "We shall have tons of apples. What will you do with them if you don't sell them, Oliver?"

He laughed at her change of pronouns and change of tone.

"I suppose in future I shall have to consult the Viceroy?" he said

"No," said Christian and coloured as she used to do when she was first married and Oliver teased her. He was going to say something more when the door opened and Jane came in with the two children.

"How do you like having Oliver back?" she said to Christian. "I think it must be rather trying. You've had such a pleasant independent life all these years, and done such wonders for Maniton. Are you going to leave everything in Christian's hands or are you going to be boss again, Oliver?"

"He is going to be boss again," said Christian.

"No; only senior partner," said Oliver.

Jane laughed at both of them and picking up Olivia set her on her father's knee.

THE END

Printed in Great Britain by Ebenezer Baylis & Son, Trinity Works, Worcester.

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.

are pleased to give the following particulars of many important New Books for the Spring, 1922, and also a splendid list of New Novels, which, as will be seen by the undermentioned names, are almost all by the Leading Authors.

GILBERT FRANKAU
GILBERT CANNAN
ETHEL M. DELL
DOROTHEA CONYERS
H. DE VERE STACPOOLE
FREDERICK SLEATH
LUCAS MALET
RAFAEL SABATINI
G. B. BURGIN
ACHMED ABDULLAH
W. E. NORRIS
C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON
REBECCA WEST
ONOTO WATANNA
DOLF WYLLARDE
ISABEL C. CLARKE
SELWYN JEPSON
E. NESBIT
CURTIS YORKE
MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK
LADY MILES
WINIFRED GRAHAM
MARGARET BAILLIE-SAUNDERS
KATHLYN RHODES
TICKNER EDWARDES
BERTA RUCK
ELIZABETH ROBINS
HELEN PROTHERO LEWIS
NELLIE L. McCLUNG
E. F. BENSON
E. M. DELAFIELD
"RITA"
CHARLES MARRIOTT
ELINOR MORDAUNT
MRS. FRANCES EVERARD
JULIETTE GORDON SMITH
BURTON E. STEVENSON
UNA L. SILBERRAD
MADAME ALBANESI
AGNES and EGERTON CASTLE
M. MORGAN GIBBON
MAX PEMBERTON
JERRARD SYRETT
MABEL BARNES-GRUNDY
BEATRICE BASKERVILLE and ELIOTT MONK

Hutchinson's Important New Books

My Life and Some Letters

By MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL
(BEATRICE STELLA CORNWALLIS-WEST)

In one large volume, cloth gilt, with numerous illustrations, **24s.** *net.*

This important book is expected to create something of a literary and social sensation. It is a frank and open autobiography, which contains intimate personal recollections and stories of her own life and of many famous people in Society, Art, Literature and the Stage. Included are a number of intimate letters by George Bernard Shaw.

Madame de Staël: Her Trials and Triumphs

By LIEUT.-COLONEL A. C. P. HAGGARD, D.S.O.

Author of "Sidelights on the Court of France," "Two Great Rivals," etc.

In cloth gilt, **16s.** *net.*

A new and fascinating book about a very remarkable woman who combined great literary gifts with a passion for political intrigue, and an almost boundless capacity for love. It is written in Colonel Haggard's usual bright and entertaining style, and is undoubtedly a very readable book.

Facing Reality

By ESMÉ WINGFIELD-STRATFORD, D.Sc.,
ex-Fellow of King's College, Cambridge

Author of "The Reconstruction of a Mind," etc.

In cloth gilt, **8s. 6d.** *net.*

The author voices the feelings, the convictions, of many thinking citizens to-day. He considers civilisation in danger of perishing owing to its neglect of reality. The problem is out of religion, but religion itself is, more than any other activity, infected by slovenly methods of thought. The tendency of men for some years past has been to "think in a passion" and to repress the unpleasant from their consciousness, instead of facing the real and boldly pursuing the truth. Many instances are given: the life of villadom aims at "gentility," a false goal; the object of intensive journalism is to distort the mind rather than to present the truth; the clergy are many of them insincere and cling desperately to old forms, now bereft of meaning; the official religion is dying of inanition. Artists are in contact with reality, but art itself is in danger of becoming commercialised. Modern war is acute suicidal mania—the remedy is for man to realise that God is not external, but within them, and that they are comrades in a struggle compared to which the greatest wars in history are the "bickerings of children."

The book is written with a sincerity which is almost fierce, and most of its pleas against prejudice carry conviction.

Hutchinson's Important New Books

The Pomp of Power ANONYMOUS

In one large handsome volume, cloth gilt, **18s.** *net.*

This very important and, having regard to its sensational revelations, most surprising book throws a searchlight upon the military and diplomatic relations of Britain and France before and during the war, and also deals with the present international situation. It contains many first-hand portraits and intimate appreciations and criticisms of characters well known in the public life of Europe: Mr. Lloyd George, Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Lord Haig, Marshal Joffre, Lord Beaverbrook, Millerand, Loucheur, Painlevé, Cambon, Lord Northcliffe, Colonel Repington, and the Bolshevist Krassin. The anonymous author clearly speaks with authority as one in close contact with the world he describes, and his revelations, apart from their historic value, are of great personal interest. There will undoubtedly be much speculation as to his identity

---

The Life of H. G. Hawker, Airman By M. A. HAWKER

In one large handsome volume, with a number of illustrations on art paper, **18s** *net*

In addition to forming an authentic record of the late Harry Hawker's flying career, including the British Height and Duration Records, his Pioneer Flights in Australia, the Round Britain Seaplane Flight, and the Atlantic Flight attempted in a machine with but one engine, which resulted in his being missing for a whole week, every chapter is full of hitherto unrecorded incidents and anecdotes, and of intense human interest.

The fact that he, starting with practically nothing, achieved undying fame and some (if not great) fortune, singles him out as the greatest British aviator. No man was more popular with his fellows or had such remarkably powerful will-power.

It is not generally known that Hawker was primarily responsible for the design of the Sopwith "Tabloid" biplane just before the war, which proved to be a prototype of the fighting scouts which gave us our ascendancy in the air.

The Last of a Race By COMTESSE de MERCY-ARGENTEAU (PRINCESS DE MONTGLYON)

In one volume, cloth gilt, with many illustrations, **21s.** *net.*

The story of a woman's life, written by herself, and a human document. The Comtesse's early days were spent at the Castle of Argenteau—later demolished by the Germans—but her life was hard and unenviable. A love affair, arbitrarily checked by her parents, was followed by an enforced marriage, and then the man she loved came again into her life, with tragic consequences. Her travels abroad while she tried to forget and the means she employed to obliterate memories are vividly described. The Comtesse was a frequent visitor to England and a personal friend of the late King Edward, and there are intimate touches of a number of well-known people. The book will be found of absorbing interest, and a number of the illustrations are of considerable historical value, as the family goes back many centuries—one Comte de Mercy-Argenteau being a guardian of Marie Antoinette.

Hutchinson's Important New Books

First Impressions of America

By DR. WALTER R. HADWEN

With illustrations, in cloth gilt, **10s. 6d.** *net.*

An extremely interesting and sympathetic account of American life in town and country, wide in scope and discussing with insight racial and social problems as viewed by an English traveller. The book includes interviews with Americans of many types, from the President downwards, and contains descriptions of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, and other trading towns, as well as the grander features of landscape, giving the reader a vivid impression of America of to-day.

Memoirs of the Memorable

By SIR JAMES DENHAM

In cloth gilt, with many illustrations, **16s.**

Sir James Denham, the poet-author of "Wake Up, England!" deals with most of the prominent social names of the end of the last and the commencement of this century, including Mr. Gladstone, Lord Beaconsfield, the late Lord Byron, Robert Browning, the Bishop of London, Cardinal Howard, Lord Dunedin, Lewis Carroll, Lord Marcus Beresford and the late Bishop of Manchester. The book also deals with club life and the leading sportsmen.

Sketches of the Russian Revolution

By GENERAL DENIKIN

In one large vol., cloth gilt, **16s.** *net.*

General Denikin was not only in high command in the field against Germany, but was also military leader of the anti-Bolsheviks, and this account of his experiences in these capacities can scarcely fail to be interesting and important from the standpoint of history. General Denikin gives a vivid account of his arrest and imprisonment by the Bolsheviks, describes the tragic vacillations of the Czar on the fatal days before the revolution, and the appalling difficulties of Russian officers during the democratisation. The book is an important one and of great historical value.

Progressive Golf

By HARRY VARDON

With 36 *illustrations on art paper. In cloth,* **5s.** *net.*

An important work on the game by one of the world's leading professionals, with very valuable progressive charts on the Driver, the Cleek, the Mid-Iron, the Mashie, the Niblick and the Putter.

Hutchinson's Important New Books

The Work of P. A. de Laszlo

Edited with Notes by OAKLEY WILLIAMS

In one large folio volume containing 61 *photogravure plates, representing some of the choicest examples of the Artist's work.*

With an Introduction by COMTE ROBERT DE MONTESQUIOU.

This collection, covering as it does the whole range of this distinguished artist's work, must be regarded as a contribution of the highest permanent value to the history of portraiture and art. A selection of the more important of the Hungarian master's pictures, portraits of monarchs, statesmen, diplomats, great ladies and famous beauties is here presented, and may be said to summarise the most important phases of the social and political history of Europe during the past twenty-five years. It has been the aim of the publishers to produce a record of Mr. de Laszlo's works of permanent value and interest to the collector, the connoisseur, and the lover of art.

The Big Four and Others at the Peace Conference

By ROBERT LANSING

In cloth gilt, with 9 *illustrations on art paper,* **8s. 6d.** *net.*

In this book the former American Secretary for State, who was one of the representatives at the Peace Conference, studies the predominant personalities of the Conference.

There are many books about the Peace Conference but none, so far, by a writer that combines such exceptional opportunity of close observation with so clear an insight into human motives, and so admirable, direct, and convincing expression. The book contains a most interesting account of the procedure of the Conference; there are four full portraits of Clemenceau, Wilson, Lloyd George and Orlando, and four impressions of Venizélos, Emir Féisul, General Botha and Paderewski.

Mr. Lansing is a keen observer of human nature, and his sketches are at once most fascinating reading and an important contribution to history.

My Cat Prospero

By ELIZABETH BRUCE ADAMS

An artistic volume, in cloth, with 8 *drawings by the Author,* **5s.** *net.*

An attractive, charming and touching account of a cat, his ways, his development, surrounded by human love and desire for his growth of mind and soul. The cult of the cat is very fashionable, apart from the regular everyday cat-lover we have always with us.

Hutchinson's Important New Books

More Memoirs and Some Travels

By G. B. BURGIN

Author of "Memoirs of a Clubman" (*2nd edition*).

In one vol., cloth gilt, **16s.** *net.*

Emboldened by the success of "Memoirs of a Clubman," Mr. G. B. Burgin has written "More Memoirs and Some Travels," in which he gives a more detailed account of his wanderings and literary experiences. There is an interesting chapter on the "Coming of Kipling," and another in which forty or fifty eminent writers describe how they first began to write. The inner life of some Bohemian clubs is also described, together with many anecdotes and little character sketches of interesting people he has met. Mr. Burgin describes his travels in Canada, Turkey, and Asia Minor, and more recent trips to Holland and Belgium. It was his good fortune to be received by the King of the Belgians one morning, lunch with Burgomaster Max afterwards, and call on Cardinal Mercier the same afternoon. It was, as he describes it, the most crowded day of his life, and one replete with interesting experiences. The book is written in Mr. Burgin's customary cheerful vein, with, here and there, occasional lapses into those pathetic happenings which come to us all.

With an Introduction by The Right Hon. DAVID LLOYD GEORGE, M.P.

The Irish Free State: Its Evolution and Possibilities

By ALBERT C. WHITE

Author of "Ireland: A Study in Facts"; Editor of "A Little Book of Irish Verse," etc.

In cloth, **3s. 6d.** *net.*

The author has been prominently associated with the Home Rule cause in Great Britain, and has written extensively on Irish subjects.

Mr. White traces the history of the relations between Great Britain and Ireland from the Act of Union down to the Great War. He then proceeds to set out in detail the developments of British politics and of Irish nationalism in their bearings upon each other.

The book is written throughout from the standpoint of a vigorous and independent mind. It will annoy extreme partisans of all shades of opinion, and will provoke much discussion. This is especially true of the concluding chapter, in which the author discusses "Some Factors in the Future."

The value of the book is enhanced by the inclusion of the essential documents of the Home Rule struggle, including the four Home Rule Bills of 1886, 1893, 1914 and 1920, and the terms of the Treaty recently concluded with Sinn Fein.

Hutchinson's Important New Books

With Lawrence in Arabia By LOWELL THOMAS

With 16 *illustrations on art paper,* **3s. 6d.** *net.*

"The greatest romance of real life ever told."—*The Strand Magazine.*

The profusely illustrated narrative of the greatest adventure of a century is now presented to the public in this popular form. The famous exploits of Colonel Lawrence, "the uncrowned King of Arabia"—whom Mr. Lloyd George described as "one of the most remarkable and romantic figures of modern times"—will be read with eager interest by all who appreciate the importance of his services to the Empire. This valuable account of our men's gallant deeds in the East is not only a splendid souvenir of the momentous years of war, but also a permanent record of British enterprise and courage which will be treasured throughout the Empire.

The Second Year of The League: A STUDY OF THE SECOND ASSEMBLY OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

By HAROLD W. V. TEMPERLEY

Reader in Modern History in the University of Cambridge

Author of "Life of George Canning," "History of the Peace Conference of Paris," etc. *In cloth,* **6s.** *net.*

The important developments in the growth of the League are indicated, and the new position as regards Mandates and Minorities and the Permanent Court of Justice explained. Particular attention is given to the two greatest achievements of the League—the settlement of the Albanian question and the Upper Silesian Award. There are many remarkable quotations from the speeches of the leading personalities both in Committee and the Assembly, which throw an interesting light on their national policies, and which have not been reproduced in this country. Special attention is given to the part played by the British Dominions and the present attitude of the United States towards the League.

The Year's Art, 1922 Compiled by A. C. R. CARTER

Crown 8vo, cloth, **8s. 6d.** *net.*

Over 600 pages, with illustrations

A concise epitome of all matters relating to the Arts of Painting, Sculpture, Engraving, and Architecture, and to Schools of Design, containing events which have occurred during the year 1921, together with information respecting the events of 1922

Hutchinson's Important New Books

Illumination and its Development in the Present Day
By SIDNEY FARNSWORTH

In one large handsome volume, cloth gilt, with Frontispiece in colour and numerous other illustrations, **24s.** *net.*

In this exhaustive work Mr. Farnsworth traces the growth of Illumination from its birth, showing, by means of numerous diagrams and drawings, its gradual development through the centuries from mere writing to the elaborate poster work and commercial lettering of the present day. Although other books have already been written on this fascinating subject, Mr. Farnsworth breaks new ground in many directions; he treats the matter from the modern standpoint in a manner which makes his work invaluable not only to students of the art, but also to the rapidly-growing public interested in what has hitherto been a somewhat exclusive craft. The book is profusely illustrated and forms a handsome addition to the library of anyone whose tastes lie in this direction.

The Return and other Poems
By E. NESBIT

Author of "Lays and Legends," "Songs of Love and Empire," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth, **4s. 6d.** *net.*

Riviera Towns
By HUBERT ADAMS GIBBONS

In large 8vo, with 32 full-page illustrations by Lester George Hornby. Boxed, **16s.** *net.*

The winter playground of Europe, that short strip of coast lying along the blue Mediterranean, which the French call Cote d'Azure, is the theme of this new volume by Dr. Gibbons. In the fifteen chapters of this book he takes the readers to the towns and hamlets, mediæval and modern, of the Riviera, and concerns himself not so much with its transient holiday-making aspect as with the charm of the countryside, its curious old towns with their ancient buildings and crooked streets, and the adventures of himself and his artist collaborator. The book is written in a holiday mood, with a charm and grace that make for delighted reading and do not detract from its value as an interpretative portrait of this picturesque corner of Europe. Mr. Hornby's drawings are more than mere illustrations, and happily reflect the mood of the text. "Riviera Towns" is handsomely bound and printed, and will, it is expected, be one of the most attractive gift books of the year.

The Little Cat Who Journeyed to St. Ives
By FRANK VER BECK

Crown quarto, with 16 illustrations and coloured picture cover, **1s. 6d.** *net.*

An admirable gift book for young people.

Hutchinson's Important New Books

3rd LARGE EDITION AT ONCE CALLED FOR

Thirteen Years at the Russian Court

By PIERRE GILLIARD

In one large handsome volume, cloth gilt.

With 59 illustrations on art paper, 24s. *net.*

Being the reminiscences of the Tutor to the late Czarevitch, including an authoritative account of the Tragedy of the Imperial Family.

The book gives an interesting and intimate picture of the private life of the Imperial Family, and describes events of which the author is in many cases the only surviving witness. The story combines a tragic human interest with direct evidence on matters of rare historical interest.

The *Daily Mail* says :—"'Thirteen Years at the Russian Court' (published to-day) Hutchinson, 24s. net, with photographs by the author) is a book of extraordinary human interest and of the first historical importance. It is the only authentic and intimate account of the Russian Sovereigns, from one who shared their family life in greatness and in captivity, and is the solitary survivor of the party imprisoned with them at Tobolsk."

The Emperor Francis Joseph and His Times

By GENERAL ALBERT VON MARGUTTI, C.V.O.

In one large handsome volume, with Illustrations, 24s. *net.*

The Author spent seventeen years in the Aides-de-Camp's department at the palace, and all that time was in direct contact with the Emperor Francis Joseph, the men and women about him, and distinguished European figures such as King Edward VII., the late Czar Nicholas II., the Emperor William II., and the Empress Eugenie, who frequently visited the aged monarch. To those interested in world politics before and during the war this book will be an indispensable guide. The author's relations of King Edward VII.'s activities at the Austrian Court would alone stamp it as a valuable record. It also throws new and highly interesting light on the problem of the Archduke Rudolph's death, and for the first time does justice to the outstanding qualities and charm of the murdered Empress Elizabeth. The author's study of the ex-Emperor Charles is remarkably lucid and penetrating, and the soundness of his judgments amply proved by recent events.

2nd LARGE EDITION

Memories and Some Base Details

By LADY ANGELA FORBES

In one volume, cloth gilt, with many illustrations, **24s.** *net.*

A frank, personal memoir containing reminiscences of many figures well known in society and in public life with whom the authoress has come into contact. The book deals with social life in the latter part of the nineteenth century as well as with that of the present day, and includes the experiences of the authoress whilst supervising a canteen in France during the war.

Hutchinson's Important Books

With the Russian Army, 1914-1917

By SIR ALFRED KNOX

In two large volumes, with 32 *illustrations on Art Paper and* 15 *large Maps.* 36s. *net.*

General Knox's despatches were the only real source of information in London of the military situation in Russia. This book not only provides much valuable first-hand material for the historian, but is also of considerable interest to the general reader.

2nd EDITION

Mexico on the Verge

By DR. E. J. DILLON

Author of "The Imperial Peace Conference," etc.

In one large volume, 21s. *net.*

"Indispensable to all who wish to understand the main factors of the Mexican situation."—*British Weekly.*

2nd LARGE EDITION

Memoirs of a Clubman

By G. B. BURGIN

With Photogravure Portrait of the Author, 16s. *net.*

Mr. G. B. Burgin, besides having more than sixty successful novels to his credit, has a reputation as a *raconteur* and clubman which few men can rival. His book is a delightful *pot-pourri* of good stories, literary and otherwise. Many famous personalities are here revealed in an illuminating and sometimes unorthodox way, and the fascination of journalism and authorship is described, perhaps unconsciously, by one of the most companionable and witty writers of our time

---

A Book about the Bee

By HERBERT MACE

In crown 8vo, *cloth, with* 24 illustrations *on art paper,* 4s. *net*

4th EDITION

The Horse as Comrade and Friend

By EVERARD R. CALTHROP

With an Introductory Letter by LORD LONSDALE.

In one large handsome volume, with 68 illustrations *from photos on art paper,* 16s. *net.*

Louis Wain's Summer Annual for 1922

With a large number of illustrations by Louis Wain. In attractive picture cover, 2s. *net.*

This famous and ever-popular Annual maintains its high standard of artistic fun in Mr. Louis Wain's inimitable style. It will appeal to all, young, old and middle-aged.

The Love-Story of Aliette Brunton

By GILBERT FRANKAU

Author of "Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant" (*65th Thousand*), "The Seeds of Enchantment," etc.

One of the most versatile writers of to-day, Mr. Gilbert Frankau follows his successes "Peter Jackson" and "The Seeds of Enchantment" with a powerful story in an entirely new vein.

In "The Love-Story of Aliette Brunton" he presents a penetrating and sympathetic study of a woman who dared all for love's sake. It is more than an interest-compelling story; it is a courageous and illuminating book, which should influence men and women who give serious thought to the modern problems of marriage and divorce.

The Great Husband Hunt

By MABEL BARNES-GRUNDY

Author of "A Girl for Sale," "Her Mad Month," etc., etc.

In "The Great Husband Hunt," Mrs. Barnes-Grundy introduces us to a delightful elderly and impecunious bachelor uncle who has shared his home in Devonshire with four nice and interesting orphan nieces, but who have been denied the gift of beauty. Unexpectedly inheriting a fortune, he offers a thousand pounds down to the first of the four who is engaged to be married within a prescribed time and a handsome dowry when the marriage is solemnised. How the four accept the challenge and set forth in quest of husbands makes a most amusing tale.

The Toll of the Black Lake

By DOROTHEA CONYERS

Author of "The Strayings of Sandy," etc.

Kathleen Donovan, a pretty, sensitive Irish girl, is an attractive figure in Mrs. Conyers' new novel. It is a story of Ireland, and the true Irish atmosphere is, as usual, admirably conveyed. Her novels about Irish people and Irish scenes stand alone in modern fiction. Thoroughly enjoyable from first chapter to last, they appeal to all who are fond of horses, hunting, excitement, and, above all, a good story.

The Pharisees

By M. MORGAN GIBBON

Author of "Jan," "Helen Marsden."

Miss M. Morgan Gibbon is a young writer whose progress is being followed with more than ordinary interest. Her second novel, "Helen Marsden," was described by a leading literary critic as "a triumph of characterisation," and the same qualities which went to make a big success of her first two books will be found in full abundance in her third.

"The Pharisees" is a well-told dramatic story in which the characters stand out with something of the crisp clearness of George Eliot.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

An Order to View By CHARLES MARRIOTT

Author of "A Grave Impertinence."

This is the story of the unexpected and far-reaching effects of an "order to view" a house for sale. James Wedmore produces the winning design for a Technical Institute which Sir John Pumphrey bestows upon his native city of Barstow, and becomes engaged to Hilda Pumphrey. In search of the home, Wedmore gets an order to view Moorend, a fifteenth-century manor house. There he also views Beatrice Woodruff, who, with her brother Martin, will have to turn out when the house is sold. The order to view revives a dead reputation, rakes up an old scandal, brings Sir John Pumphrey into competition with a civic rival, and exposes a mistake in his own past. The tangle is cut by Hilda, who acts dramatically; and Wedmore is left with a keen and happy appreciation of the moral of the symphony, "Trust your angels."

A Daughter of the Sand

By MRS. FRANCES EVERARD

A Remarkable First Novel

Saada Medene, a girl of reputed mixed blood, is persuaded by her lover, Lance Railsford, to accompany him to El Bouira, where an ex-consulship awaits him. Lance finds himself cold-shouldered by European residents when they hear that he is to marry Saada, but the wedding takes place. The same day a wire arrives from Lance's mother to the effect that a wealthy uncle is dying and will leave him money if he returns to England immediately and breaks off his engagement with Saada. He makes his departure with many false excuses, unaware that Saada knows the real reason for his going, and though she has now learnt that she is wholly of English nationality, she keeps this joyful truth to herself. Later, Lance tires of his wealth and determines to return to Saada, but Fate intervenes, and Saada becomes free to marry Forrester, an Englishman she has rescued from the dope habit, who returns her love with all his heart.

This novel of unusual power rings true to life from start to finish, and with its picturesque setting of Northern Africa it is sure to be widely read and appreciated.

A Breaker of Ships By FREDERICK SLEATH

Author of "Sniper Jackson," etc.

Those who love an exciting story full of thrilling adventures and strange happenings will not be disappointed in this new volume by Mr. Sleath. Yet, weird and uncanny as some of the adventures are, they are not overdrawn, and the characters are realistic and convincing. Big Jim, joint owner with his brother of the Carn Shipbreaking and Salvage Company, emerges victorious from a struggle with Finkler, a mean competitor, and the succession of thrilling episodes concludes with one which forms a fitting climax.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Captain Blood — By RAFAEL SABATINI

Author of "Scaramouche," "The Trampling of the Lilies," etc.

From the logs and diaries of Jeremiah Pitt—which Mr. Sabatini claims to have discovered—the romantic story of Captain Peter Blood has been mainly reconstructed.

Sir Henry Morgan, most celebrated of all the buccaneer leaders, had an able chronicler in the person of the Dutchman Esquemeling, who sailed with him. What Esquemeling did for Morgan, Jeremiah Pitt has done for Captain Blood.

The career of Blood, a cultured man driven by the malignity of Fate to indulge an inborn appetite for adventure, is an Odyssey set aglow by the great love which kept him honourable amid dishonour.

Love and the Locusts — By G. B. BURGIN

Author of "The Shutters of Silence," etc.

In "Love and the Locusts" Mr. Burgin returns to his favourite haunts at "Four Corners," that little riverine village of the Ottawa Valley. Cyrus Field and Cissy Fulks were lovers when young. Cyrus "put out," made money, and forgot Cissy. "Old Man" Fulks also made money and died. Years after Cyrus and Cissy meet again, and she proposes that he should return to Four Corners with a hundred dollars, forgo his riches, and try to become the Cyrus Field of old.

Their endeavours to recapture the years which the locusts have eaten are described with Mr. Burgin's customary charm and literary skill.

Night Drums — By ACHMED ABDULLAH

Author of "The Trail of the Beast."

This romance is of Africa, that vast, mysterious country which this author knows so well how to portray. All the fascination and colour of Africa are here, and her soul—that eternal mystery to the white man—is dimly discernible through the threads of the story and the well-drawn character of the Master of the Hour, the dominating influence in the story. This black Napoleon has erected a marvellous ivory temple in the heart of Africa, and is gathering the tribes together to make a great nation that will drive out the white man. The Master of the Hour is fierce and bloodthirsty, and the sombre echo of his drums can be heard, dim and mysterious, throughout Africa. Davies, in charge of a French garrison, discovers the black man's machinations with the help of an Arab, and is the means of wrecking his plans. Davies's relations with Jacqueline supply an interesting love element to a most enthralling story.

Sabine and Sabina — By W. E. NORRIS

Author of "Triumphs of Sara," etc.

This novel shows Mr. Norris at his best. It is the story of the god-daughter of the narrator and her matrimonial experiences, which bring about various alarming situations, but they end happily enough. The scene is laid partly in London and partly in the south of Spain.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Brightener By C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

Authors of "The Lightning Conductor," etc.

Elizabeth, the Princess de Miramare, beautiful, high-born, and of a bewitching personality, a member of the most brilliant society, outwardly prosperous, lived the secretly hard life of those who have to make very short ends meet.

Two courses were open to her—one to resort to a distant and odious cousin; the other to use her charm and position to help others (for a consideration) in their social and heart struggles. She decides upon the latter. Her cases are all exciting, some dangerous, and the most unexpected and disconcerting element in each is the intervention of the distant cousin.

Elizabeth's own romance is the fitting climax of the story.

The Judge By REBECCA WEST

Author of "The Return of the Soldier."

Miss West is one of our clever modern novelists who aim at reality in art. With her vivid, dramatic style and her passion for truth she writes of life from an unusual angle, and her work has a curiously distinctive quality of its own which makes an instant appeal to all who appreciate sincerity in human relationships. Her latest novel is a brilliant piece of work—emotional, yet taking an original line which breaks down many of the old traditions, and ringing with the voice of the new generation.

Sunny-San By ONOTO WATANNA

Author of "A Japanese Nightingale" (200*th Thousand*).

This attractive and original story is full of the deepest human interest. It seems an altogether new experience when we first meet Sunny, but yet we find that this fascinating, flower-like little creature has everything in common with what we have most admired in human nature. The daughter of an American and a Japanese dancer of good caste, Sunny is rescued from her unhappy life by four young men who are touring Japan with their professor. They place her under the care of a kind missionary and his wife, and pay for her education. Never forgetful of her benefactors, Sunny eventually finds her father. He and his childless wife are enchanted with Sunny, and show her every indulgence. During Leap Year Sunny proposes to Jerry Hammond, one of the four young men, and her happiness is complete.

Men, Women, and Beasts By H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

Author of "The Blue Lagoon."

This is a collection of stories of Equatorial Africa, nearly all of the same colour and drawn from the wild places of the world—stories of men, women, and beasts either met with or imagined from life. Each story is a living thing, because it has its origin in life and Imagination for a mother.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Lavender Lad — By DOLF WYLLARDE

Author of "Mafoota," etc.

This is an emotional drama presented by a practised hand, set in charming scenery, and enacted by characters who are most attractive and convincing.

The Lavender Lad is Miss Carlotta Edison, a clever actress of the variety stage, who goes to a lavender farm disguised as a ragged urchin. Here she falls in love with the farmer, a fine, manly yeoman, and there is a dramatic scene when he discovers her identity. They part, only to meet again two years later, when the somewhat Puritanical farmer has learned forgiveness and is sufficiently in love to forget Carlotta's not quite spotless past. This is one of the most attractive of Dolf Wyllarde's many delightful novels.

The Light on the Lagoon

By ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "Lady Trent's Daughter," etc.

This appealing story is told with Miss Clarke's usual power and sincerity. Escaping from the narrow conventionality of her mother's love, Sydney Flood, a girl with deep emotions and artistic temperament, goes to Venice with her friend Roma Cochraine and her husband. Here she falls in love with Clive Moreton, who proposes to her, but who is drawn back to the beautiful and capricious Roma shortly afterwards. Sydney, miserable and forsaken, returns to Venice, to find that Roma's husband is dead and that she has married Clive. Sydney finds relief in her despair in the Catholic Faith, and becomes the happy wife of a barrister who has long been in love with her. The strong human interest and the beauty of the setting of this story will make it appeal to a large class of readers.

That Fellow MacArthur

By SELWYN JEPSON

Author of "The Qualified Adventurer."

A new novel by Selwyn Jepson, the successful author of "The Qualified Adventurer." It tells in a thrilling story of the romance and adventures that come into the life of a Scotsman, one Ian MacArthur, who appeared in "The Qualified Adventurer" as a friend of the hero, Duffy. MacArthur, of placid temperament, is caught up into a whirl of circumstances that turn him into a thorough-going adventurer in spite of his desire to lead an orderly life. A natural woman-hater, he falls at last into the toils of the little god with the sharp arrows, who singles him out to love Joan, the beautiful heroine. Their adventures together on the unknown waters of the Amazons bring the story to an ingenious and surprising climax.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Lark — By E. NESBIT

Author of "A Holiday Honeymoon," etc.

This author needs no introduction to her readers. "The Lark" has all the charm and freshness which have made Miss Nesbit's former novels so justly popular, and yet the story is entirely new and original Two girls, Jane and Lucille, are led by Jane's guardian to entertain high hopes. The fortune, however, which Jane was to have inherited, has been lost by unlucky speculations, and the two girls have to set about earning their own livings. They experience many adventures and ups and downs of fortune before they meet with the two men who ensure their happiness and prosperity. A delightful story, well worth reading.

Peter's People — By CURTIS YORKE

Author of "The Unknown Road."

Curtis Yorke's new novel tells how a young man (Peter Wistray) brings his wife to live in the same house as his mother and sisters, who are dependent on him. The arrangement leads to various complications, as Peter's family resent his being married at all, and his wife, Pamela, resents their attitude towards her. Things go from bad to worse, and tragic happenings are narrowly averted. But gradually Lady Wistray and her daughters are won over by Pamela's charm, and all ends well. Though the plot is comparatively simple, the interest is absorbing, and the characterisation and dialogue are of a high order.

Chrysalis — By MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK

Author of "The Purple Jar."

This is the story of a man who, after a flirtation with an older woman, marries a very young girl, and at first treats her in a high-handed way. She submits partly because she is young and inexperienced and partly because she is very much in love. Gradually, as she develops, a change comes over her relations with her husband, and he discovers in his wife a force of character and brain that earns his respect. The setting is one of English country life.

Green Leaf — By LADY MILES

Author of "The Red Flame," etc.

A study of two characters. Cukoo—beautiful and self-sufficing, who lives by the light of cold philosophy and will not allow herself to be in any way entangled by human affairs of either love or hatred—and Brunetta, her cousin, plain, warm-hearted, and most intensely a woman, with all a woman's hopes and fears and passions.

The plot is developed with the same great skill as was shown by Lady Miles in her very successful novel, "The Red Flame," now in its third edition.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Da Silva's Widow — LUCAS MALET

Author of "Sir Richard Calmady," etc.

Of these nine stories by this distinguished author five are concerned with the modern English world before the war. The remaining four, though in no sense war-stories, arise through conditions imposed by the war. The stories, as a whole, cover a wide range of incidents, scene, and emotion, and even venture in two cases to make excursions into the region of the supernatural.

Short Shipments — ELINOR MORDAUNT

Author of "The Little Soul," etc.

These stories range from the delicately mystical, as in that strange story, "The Fountain"—where the heroine, half water-sprite, half woman, a sort of Celtic Undine, is set among the wild scenery of North Wales; the intimate psychology of a woman of forty, as portrayed in "A Study in Pastel"; to the most widely differing and yet no less intimate studies of the sea and the ways of sailor-men as are given us in "Fighting Cocks" and "The Skipper's Yarn," and from these on such strange tales of life in the East End and on the riverside of London as we find in "The Man Who Kept Birds" and "The Yellow Cat." In no volume of stories ever published, indeed, has the range been wider or more amazingly varied, and "Short Shipments" goes to form a worthy successor to the author's last collection, "New Wine in Old Bottles."

The Wednesday Wife

By JULIETTE GORDON SMITH

Attar Abu Hamed had only three wives—a modest number for a gentleman of Tunis. It was Aletra, the "Wednesday" wife, whom Attar really loved. When a plague raged in the city, one of the other wives discovered a wonderful potion, and was called to the Sultan's palace to save the princess. Aletra went instead, and her adventure there—the pursuit by the Sultan, the flight to the desert—make a romance that the Westerner finds it hard to credit as real. This writer knows the East, and her picture is convincing. Her story takes a surprising turn, and we find our convictions as to this Eastern charm suddenly veering back to a Western standard.

By Whose Hand? By BEATRICE BASKERVILLE and ELIOTT MONK

A story showing the final stages of a vendetta which was begun in the sixteenth century, developing the psychological results of the continual pursuit of vengeance.

It follows, in a series of stirring incidents in various parts of Europe, the fortunes of the descendants of the original protagonists, and shows how the feud was at last brought to an end by the efforts of a famous Italian detective.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Kingmakers

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "Little Comrade" (*54th Thousand*).

A thrilling, modern romance of a throne and the intrigue that surrounded it. A famous journalist, whose extraordinary adventures play a leading part in the story, is dragged into the whirlpool of intrigue, passion, and devotion, with results as exciting to the reader as everyone concerned in this fight for a throne.

The Honest Man

By UNA L. SILBERRAD

Author of "Green Pastures," etc.

The scene of Miss Silberrad's new novel is laid partly in London and partly in Kendal and the moor country that lies on the border of Westmorland and Yorkshire. It is the story of how a sober, middle-aged citizen of the seventeenth century came into a fortune and found romance; and of the unexpected things that happened as a result of this change in his circumstances. There is a very charming love interest in the story, as one would expect from the author of "Green Pastures" and "Sampson Rideout—Quaker."

Truth in a Circle

By MADAME ALBANESI

Author of "Poppies in the Corn," etc.

This excellent collection of Madame Albanesi's short stories will be of great interest to all admirers of her work, as it contains much that is representative of the distinctive quality of her writing. All these stories are modern, and deal with every-day life, some grave and some gay, but every one of interest to lovers of good fiction.

Kitty and Others

By AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

These authors need no introduction to their readers, since their originality and charm have placed them in the very forefront of present-day English writers.

This novel can be classed among the very best of their works, and cannot fail to please all who appreciate a bright and original tale. Dealing with the manners and light-hearted intrigues of upper-class French society at the end of the eighteenth century, the authors strike a note of deeper emotion even while they expose more superficial follies and vanities with reality and charm.

The varied and fascinating characters are described by means of their intrigues and adventures with wit and vivacity.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Woman Who Knew — By MAX PEMBERTON

Here we have the fiction of many countries. Mr. Max Pemberton has laid his scenes chiefly in Europe, but he has visited Spain, Morocco, the Riviera and the Balearic Isles in quest of material. All is post-war, and the war has no place in this virile volume. Sex stories abound, but there are also scenes of adventure in Mr. Pemberton's best mood. Particularly interesting are those chapters which deal with the Mediterranean and the isles adjacent; while lovers of Le Toquet will find much to interest them. The whole volume is representative of the author's bias toward the love story and the story of adventure; while the dramatic note is, as usual, heard in all the more stirring episodes. It may be added that humour is not absent and that in "William de Luxe" we have one of the drollest stories of recent years.

The Road to Anywhere — By RITA

Author of "Peg the Rake," etc.

In this powerful new story the author tells us of the adventures of three girls leaving their English school, Annette who is French, Anna a German, and Stella an English girl.

Where will the Road to Life, the Road to Anywhere lead them?

This thoroughly absorbing love story is sure to be in great demand.

Sembal — By GILBERT CANNAN

Author of "Pugs and Peacocks," etc.

The central figure of "Sembal" is developed with force and subtlety, and several aspects of the Semitic character under the stress of war are delineated with an incisive realism of great interest to the general reader as well as to the special student.

A NEW NOVEL BY ETHEL M. DELL

Charles Rex — By ETHEL M. DELL

Author of "The Bars of Iron" (302*nd Thousand*), "The Hundredth Chance" (240*th Thousand*). *Ready in August.*

Alf, Old Chum — By JERRARD SYRETT

Author of "A Household Saint."

In cloth, 3s. 6d. *net.*

"Alf" is a plumber. He has been to the war and come through. He is an ex-sergeant-major of the Buffs—over six foot, a good citizen and a good workman. He has his pals and they meet and talk and have a glass or two at The Bull and Grapes. The pals are quite well presented, but Alf is the prominent figure. Alf is a jolly good fellow, and his head is screwed on the right way—a real London working-man, loyal to his country, and no Bolshi or Communist.

This is a clever study, an appealing presentation of the sort of working-man we can respect and like.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

John Edgar's Angels By WINIFRED GRAHAM

Author of "Breakers on the Sand," "The Daughter Terrible," "Falling Waters," etc.

Winifred Graham's new novel deals with the love of a man for two women, one a Society beauty, the other the piquante daughter of a prosperous grocer. The character of the hero, John Edgar, is a curious mixture of Puritanical idealism and fiery passion. His unhappy childhood is a striking contrast to his subsequent career, when, in new and bewildering society, he meets the beautiful daughter of Lord Porthminster. Through the ramifications of a plot that seems more like real life than fiction, one wonders whether John Edgar's story is not a human document lightly disguised.

Vanderdecken By H. de VERE STACPOOLE

Author of "The Pearl Fishers," etc.

Here is a novel of to-day absolutely alive. Every character individual. You are seized by Hank Fischer at once, and with him and Bud du Cane and Tommie Coulthurst you go through the strangest adventures on the Pacific Coast to an end logical and worked towards mainly through the character of the chief protagonist, Bob Cardon. The sea fills the book, and its song from the Golden Gate to San Nicolas and the Bay of Wales.

Makeshifts

By MARGARET BAILLIE-SAUNDERS

Author of "The Mayoress's Wooing," etc.

How a woman in love lets a strange man suffer to save her own happiness, and then offers herself sacrificially to redeem him, gives this novel its title.

By a sudden tide of very curious circumstances a Welsh draper's daughter in the Midlands, Myfanwy Rhos, has the whole public reputation of a famous priest placed in her hands. He is publicly accused, and by a word she can save him.

It is timely and topical, and will be widely read, the more so because its subject is dealt with sympathetically and without rancour from one who writes of Church matters from the inside. This is what is called a strong novel of human passion and spiritual struggle, but it is presented with vivacity and colour, and never for a moment loses its "go" and interest.

A New Novel by the "Thomas Hardy of Sussex,"

The Seventh Wave By TICKNER EDWARDES

Author of "The Honey-Star," "Tansy," etc.

"Long Len," the hero of this powerful, arresting story, belongs to a class which we believe to be absolutely new in fiction—that strange, wandering, homeless crew of mortals known as "Pikers," men who haunt the wild Sussex highlands, scraping up a bare subsistence by selling blackberries, mushrooms, and the like to the people in the neighbouring villages and towns. In "The Seventh Wave," Mr. Tickner Edwardes well maintains his reputation as a forceful, original writer.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Antagonisms — By ELIZABETH ROBINS

Author of "The Magnetic North," etc.

In her new book Miss Robins gives us a most arresting story and an extremely clever psychological study.

Henry Ellerton, whose experience of women, his late wife included, has been most unfortunate, returns, a confirmed woman-hater, to his remote English estate after the war, to find that a widow with her son has secured the lease of the house nearest to his. The first encounter between the two is significant; mistaking him for a tramp, the widow orders him off the premises, but they gradually become better acquainted and arouse the hostility of the lady's son, a young soldier who from the first is bitterly opposed to the friendship. The boy returns to his regiment, but his mother's secretary, who is in love with him, keeps watch and sends for him when scandalous tales begin to circulate in the neighbourhood. The rest of the book represents the difficulty of a man and woman in middle life, faced on the one hand by the rigid dictates of convention, and on the other by the habits and prejudices of years

The author has chosen difficult types for her chief characters, but she has drawn them with a skill and consistency which will surprise even those readers who know her best. With its deep human interest and original plot, "Antagonisms" is a book which will appeal to all.

The Fire Opal — By HELEN PROTHERO LEWIS

Author of "Love and the Whirlwind," etc.

The story of a beautiful girl, Iris Mordaunt, who has a bad family history. Her father drinks himself mad and has to be removed to a lunatic asylum. Her mother had previously run away from her husband with another man, and her husband had refused to divorce her. An uncle is appointed as guardian to Iris. The family weakness for drink shows itself in her even at the age of ten. Her uncle does not drink, but he perceives the tendency in her, encourages it, and in many subtle ways strives to wreck her, so that he may obtain absolute control of the situation and the property.

Her mother, a beautiful woman, forsaken by her lover, tries to get possession of her child, but the uncle cunningly frustrates her just as she is on the eve of success. She leaves behind for Iris her most cherished ornament, a magnificent opal

Written by this popular authoress, it is a moving tale with a strong human interest.

A Desert Cain — By KATHLYN RHODES

Author of "The Will of Allah," etc.

A collection of stories by one of the most widely read of living authors, who paints with her pen vivid pictures of the fire and passion of the East.

Each story is beautifully finished, the settings varying from the desert, Cairo, the Nile and India to London at the present day and a little English fishing village.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

A BIG CANADIAN NOVEL

Purple Springs — By NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Author of "The Second Chance," etc.

Pearl Watson, a girl of fifteen, is asked to wait three years by the man she loves. She waits in a radiant dream. The three years end, and the whole government of the province is by this time involved in this love story. Nellie McClung's latest, greatest Canadian novel.

20,000 copies have already been called for in Canada of this popular novel. It is now first published in this country.

Miss Mapp — By E. F. BENSON

Author of "Dodo Wonders," etc.

Clever, amusing, it is a chronicle of the doings of a group of women and men in a seaside township. Of this group, Miss Mapp is the dominating personality. Not too *passé*, she has set her mind on one day marrying Major Flint, retired. The reader is carried along easily; it all makes entertaining reading, true to life as lived by the comfortably-placed human beings in an English township.

The Post War Girl — By BERTA RUCK

Author of "His Official Fiancée," etc. (*117th Thousand*).

This selection of stories by Berta Ruck is divided into two parts: those written before the Great War and those written during or after. A somewhat startling and unlooked-for contrast! Problems were presented to the pre-war girl which do not worry her present-day sisters —and *vice versa*. Love and money (or rather, her living) were essential to both. But love, *before* nineteen-fourteen, was apparently less complex a problem than it now is. Compare the case of "the Rector's Winnie" or of "Pandora" (both pre-war maidens) with that of "Patsie" and her "Flying Cabbage," or of "Miss Blonde Verity" and her two affinities. Berta Ruck finds that the outlook of her sex has been modified. And that of the young men, is it the same? Perhaps the answer is to be found in "The Whisper," "The Young Man of Yesterday," or "The Downward Smile."

RECENTLY PUBLISHED. 8/6 net.

Humbug — By E. M. DELAFIELD

Author of "Tension," "The Heel of Achilles."

This is a penetrating study in education by the brilliant daughter of Mrs. de la Pasture (Lady Clifford). "Humbug" is a striking novel. The character-drawing is subtle, clear and convincing. Lily, the character round whom the story centres, her parents, her aunt, her husband, think, suffer and rejoice as living folk.

OVER TWO MILLION ALREADY SOLD

NEW VOLUMES OF

Hutchinson's Famous 3/6 Net Novels

Each in crown 8vo, printed on good paper, cloth bound, with most attractive picture wrapper in colours

Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant
By GILBERT FRANKAU

Now in its 65th Thousand. First time in cheap edition.

The Golden Apple By KATHLYN RHODES

Author of "The Desert Dreamers," "The City of Palms," etc.

A thrilling story by this famous writer, whose marvellous interpretation of the East has made her one of the most widely read of all living authors.

She and Allan By H. RIDER HAGGARD

Author of "King Solomon's Mines," "She," etc.

Lady Lilith By STEPHEN McKENNA

Author of "Sonia Married," "The Secret Victory," etc.

The Dummy Hand
By C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON

Authors of "The Lightning Conductor," etc.

The Seeds of Enchantment
By GILBERT FRANKAU

Author of "Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant," now in its 65th Thousand.

A Girl for Sale
By MABEL BARNES-GRUNDY

Author of "Her Mad Month," "An Undressed Heroine," etc.

An Entirely NEW Work Costing £50,000

HUTCHINSON'S STORY of the BRITISH NATION

The First Connected Pictorial and Authoritative History of the British Peoples, from the Earliest Times to the Present Day.

Edited by

WALTER HUTCHINSON

M.A., F.R.G.S., F.R.A.I., Barrister-at-Law.
Editor Hutchinson's 'History of the Nations,' etc.

Written by the

LEADING HISTORIANS

Early contributors include:

Prof. J. E. LLOYD, M.A., D.Litt.
J. A. R. MARRIOTT, M.A., M.P.
Sir Richard TEMPLE, Bart., C.B., C.I.E.
The Very Rev. W. H. HUTTON, D.D.
Prof. K. H. VICKERS, M.A., F.R.Hist.S.
A. D. INNES, M.A.
W. F. REDDAWAY, M.A., F.R. Hist.S.
C. Grant ROBERTSON, C.V.O., M.A.
P. VELLACOTT, D.S.O., M.A.
H. W. C. DAVIS, C.B.E., M.A.
Prof. R. S. RAIT, C.B.E., M.A.
H. W. TEMPERLEY, M.A., O.B.E.

With over **2,000 Beautiful Pictures** by well-known artists, and a number of fine **Coloured Plates**, printed throughout on the best English art paper.

In about 48 fortnightly parts, price 1s. 3d.

NO illustrated art work, adequate or worthy of the subject, has yet appeared unfolding the romantic and fascinating story of the British Peoples at home and throughout the world from ancient times to to-day.

For the first time Leading Historians give a popular, connected, and up-to-date account of this wonderful story, and their narratives, added to the *thousands of pictures and maps* which will appear, enable us to visualise the life of every age as if we were actually living at the time.

Hutchinson's "STORY OF THE BRITISH NATION" will be a standard work, an invaluable asset for all time, a lasting source of instruction and pleasure to everyone, old and young.

MAR 21 1951
APR 5 1951
JUN 12 1953
DEC 22 1982
JAN 10 1984
APR 22 1992
APR 24 1992
VEF
.Si 13
.v
LIBRARY OF THE BOSTON ATHENAEUM
VEF .Si13 .v cutter
Sidgwick, Alfred/Victorian
3 1807 00115 9426